

THE CHIEF OF SCOUTS' UNKNOWN RESCUER!

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Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse; Or, Texas Jack's Death-Shot. BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



"DROP THAT STONE ON THOSE SOLDIERS, AND IT IS THE LAST ACT OF YOUR LIFE!" THE SPEAKER WAS BUFFALO BILL.

Buffalo Bill's Red-skin Ruse;

OR,

Texas Jack's Death-Shot.

A ROMANCE OF THE

Overland Desperado Giant.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF THE "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD NEMESIS.

"DROP that stone on those soldiers, and it is the last act of your life!"

The speaker was Buffalo Bill, the King of Plainsmen; the one he addressed in such stern and threatening words was a giant, a wild creature of herculean size, who, with an immense boulder raised above his head, was about to hurl it downward from the cliff upon which he stood, to crush to death some unfortunates of a column of soldiers marching through a canyon.

The deep voice of the scout, the threat, caused the wild-looking man to start suddenly, sway to and fro, as though about to fall over the cliff, and turn his fierce, rugged face upon the one whose hand had fallen heavily upon his shoulder, and whose revolver was pointed directly for his heart.

In spite of his start and his look of almost consternation, he still held the huge rock aloft—still appeared as though about to hurl it upon the soldiers beneath.

Would he, in defiance of the threatening words of Buffalo Bill and that deadly revolver, take the chances and send the stone on its mission of death?

It seemed for a moment as though he would—madman that he evidently was.

Then his fierce eyes seemed to take in the calm, determined scrutiny of the scout, to see in the fearless face indomitable will and undaunted nerve, and, quick as a flash, his look of ferocity changed to one of deepest cunning.

His eyes lost their fierceness of expression, and drooped before the commanding gaze of Buffalo Bill, while he turned, lowered the rock from its elevation above his head, placed it upon the ground without seeming effort, and then faced the man who had cowed him, standing like one utterly subdued by a mightier will than his own.

His cruel mouth grinned, his features twitched, his form trembled convulsively, and he said in a deep voice, full of pathos:

"Why stay the avenging arm against those whom I am sworn to slay?"

"Are you a renegade to your own race that you strike at the likes of those who are to protect you from the Indians?" asked the scout, sternly.

"Protect me? Ha, ha! Why, I need no protection, and those soldiers are not of my race; they are my foes," almost shouted the man.

"What have you against them?"

"What have I not against them?"

"I tell you that I am their foe—a sworn avenger of terrible wrongs they brought upon me."

Buffalo Bill hesitated before replying. He realized that the man before him either had suffered some great wrong through the army, or else that he was insane, and his diseased mind conjured wrongs that were in imagination only.

He saw that the column of soldiers were still passing, straggling along on the march, cavalry, artillery and infantry, with his own scouts in the advance—all told, a thousand men.

They were on a march to strike a blow at an Indian village, and to surprise it.

There was not one man, it seemed, scout or soldier, who had looked up at the cliff, or they would have seen there the tall form of the Mad Avenger, and realized their danger from that huge mass of rock he meant to have hurled upon them.

In a few minutes more the soldiers would have passed, and the chief of scouts would be left to master the giant as best he could.

The Mad Hercules wore in his belt a pair of large revolvers, and an enormous knife, and that he would use them the scout did not for a moment doubt.

Powerful as he himself was, and active and quick, Buffalo Bill did not care for a test of strength with one who had raised the enormous rock above his head as if it had been but a hundred weight.

So, all things considered, the scout felt that he must use strategy with the madman, and not force or weapons.

He gazed at him with deepest interest. Fully six feet four in height, he was, with massive shoulders, limbs large and rigid with muscles, and weighing fully two hundred and thirty pounds, yet of perfect form from head to foot—a veritable Hercules.

His face, the hue of leather and as hardened, was cast in a noble mold, the features being perfect, though the eyes were intensely fierce, and the expression of the face was cruelly stern and determined.

The garb of the strange being was scant, consisting of a bearskin hunting-shirt, leaving the arms exposed from the shoulders, and leggings of undressed deerskin, while buffalo-hide moccasins covered his feet, and a foxskin cap sheltered his head.

His hair and beard were unkempt and worn long, and there were streaks of gray in both.

A rope sufficed for a belt about his waist, and in this his weapons were stuck without holsters.

Such was the wild being that Buffalo Bill now had to deal with, and must subdue by strategy or a bullet, not by mere physical strength.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET MARCH.

"I WOULD not advise sending the force, colonel, though of course I am ready to guide the expedition if you wish."

So spoke Buffalo Bill * the chief of scouts at Fort Vale, Utah, some twenty-five years ago, when the far frontier was a scene of danger, and brave men fell by the score in fighting their way further and further into the land of the setting sun.

Fort Vale was situated in the Mormon country, and in the midst of a wilderness infested by savage Indian tribes who were ever ready to strike a blow at the settlers whom the army protected, yet were friendly toward the followers of Brigham Young, only because they knew that there was warfare between the "Saints" and the Government.

This friendship the Mormons encouraged, as it the better protected them by keeping out of their country Gentile settlers.

Fort Vale was in the mountains, upon a spur overlooking a vast expanse of country, and near it was a most fertile vale, through which ran a large, swift-flowing stream.

Parts of this vale were cultivated by the soldiers at the fort, and there were thousands of other acres used as pasture lands for the horses and cattle of the fort, and which were guarded by a company of Cowboy Rangers constantly on the watch for danger, so that if an alarm was given they could drive their herds into the fort corrals for safety.

The fort itself was impregnable against an attack by any force of Indians, as the latter had several times found to their cost. It was garrisoned strongly with a battery of eight guns, a regiment of infantry and five companies of cavalry. Besides this strength there were Buffalo Bill's scouts of half a hundred men, and the Cowboy Ranger company of many more, also under the chief of scouts' command.

All told, there were fifteen hundred men at Fort Vale, the families of many of the officers, a few settlers in the vale and half a hundred miners scattered in the mountains near, looking for hidden riches.

Colonel Carrol Kent, the officer in command, was a dashing, fine looking cavalry soldier who had made a record in the Civil War and commanded a fighting division of Boys in Blue, dropping back from his rank as major-general to that of colonel, after the war, and being sent to the dangerous and important post of Fort Vale.

In response to Buffalo Bill's remark which opens this chapter, the colonel replied:

"Explain just why you advise against

* Now famous the world over, then an army scout. Known as Buffalo Bill far and wide, he is Colonel W. F. Cody in private life, and honored and respected by all who know him.—THE AUTHOR.

this expedition into the Indian country, Cody."

"Well, sir, to attack the Indian camp we have to make a long and hard march of it, and the only chance of perfect success is to surprise them, as they can throw all of three thousand warriors against you, and you will hardly be able to send out over a third of that number."

"That is the number I will send, one thousand men; but why can they not be surprised?"

"Their hunting parties are constantly roving about, sir, and if some of them do not discover us, you know that we are closely watched by the Mormons, and it would be to their advantage to send a courier at once to the Indian camp to warn them of your coming; and, as I said, sir, it must be a surprise to be a success, these facts would seem to make a surprise impossible."

"A very reasonable inference. Now what else?"

"We would be driven back if the Indians were warned, sir, and that would mean a retreat that might end in great disaster."

"I am glad to have your views, Cody, for they are just my own, and I have so stated to the commanding general, but he, urged in turn from Washington, says a blow must be struck to utterly destroy the power of the Indians here, and which will by thus depriving the Mormons of their secret ally, immensely weaken their own powers also."

"So, thus urged, I have picked my men, and will make the expedition."

"I am sorry, colonel."

"So am I, but there is no alternative."

"I shall march light, carrying three guns, four troops of cavalry, five companies of infantry, and your band of scouts—your Bedouins as you call them."

"Now, what have you to suggest to expedite matters?"

"That you start right after nightfall, sir, and make a forced march to a spot I will guide you to, which will be a good hiding-place until noon, when you can again move, and by rapid marching, strike the main Indian camp that night."

"Only thus can we hope to get ahead of any couriers giving the alarm."

"All right. Hold yourself and your Bedouins in readiness for to-morrow night," Colonel Kent ordered.

Buffalo Bill went direct to his quarters, uneasy in mind, and with no wish to guide an expedition which he almost knew would not be a success.

However, he made his arrangements, as his superior had indicated, and just after night set in the next day, the command pulled out of the fort in ominous silence, Colonel Carrol Kent himself at its head, and Buffalo Bill and his Bedouins well in advance.

It was past midnight when the command, after a rapid march, came to the camp the chief of scouts had selected, and all were soon in deep repose, even the scout sentinels.

The next day at noon a start was made, men and horses fully rested, and Buffalo Bill led them along as fast as the infantry could march and the guns be dragged.

Toward evening he sent word to Colonel Kent that he would scout well ahead alone, as they were approaching a pass where, if their expedition was known, they would doubtless find some of the vigilant hostiles on the watch.

So, bidding his lieutenant, Texas Jack * to push on with his men in advance, Buffalo Bill branched off to one side, and, leaving the valley, made his way along a range which he knew would shorten the distance by miles and allow him to reach the pass an hour before the command could be there.

Hitching his horse in a cedar thicket, he approached the cliff on foot, intending to keep watch over the pass until the soldiers arrived, and be able to see if any Indian, or horseman courier should go by, coming along any one of the several trails that centered there.

What was his surprise, as he neared the

* J. B. Omohundro, a Virginian who went to sea as a lad, was wrecked on the Texas Coast, became a Texan cowboy, then a ranger, served as a Confederate soldier, and after the war joined Buffalo Bill's scouts on the frontier and made a name for himself.—THE AUTHOR.

cliff, to see a huge human form seated upon a large rock almost upon the cliff's very edge.

He could have killed the man then, but would not do so, and was wondering how he could approach nearer, unseen, when he saw him start to his feet, utter a savage shout, and, seizing the heavy rock wave it to and fro like a plaything.

"The soldiers are coming and he means mischief, so I must act," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he walked quickly forward unseen by the giant, until he spoke to him.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST GUIDE.

"Where is Buffalo Bill?"

That question ran from lip to lip as the command came to a halt just at dark to camp for an hour for rest and supper.

The scouts had first wondered about their chief and then asked questions among themselves as to his not having met them at the pass.

Texas Jack had expected to find him there, knowing the shorter trail he had taken, and which a marching army could not have pursued.

But, the chief of scouts was not at the pass, and the searching eyes of the skilled scouts failed to discover that he had even been there.

Nor was there any trail of any one having lately passed that way.

This last discovery was a relief, for it told them that if any one had gone to warn the Indian camp of their coming, he had not passed that way, and Texas Jack did not believe the marching column had been seen by Indians or Mormons, who could travel any other trail and get there ahead of them.

Jack had halted to confer with Colonel Kent, who looked anxious when told that Buffalo Bill had not met them at the pass.

But Buffalo Bill had notified Texas Jack of the trail from the pass, by which he would guide the force, and so the leader rode ahead with his scouts once more.

At nightfall Jack camped in a meadow bordered by a stream.

There was plenty of grass, water and wood, and the men were allowed to build fires and have a hot supper.

Then weapons and accouterments were looked to, and, men and horses well rested, the command moved ahead again, one and all now most anxious about the missing chief of scouts.

At last it was decided that Cody must have gone on ahead, to await the command near the Indian village, which he had reconnoitered for the attack.

Against this, however, was Texas Jack's assertion that there was no trail, and that his chief could have gone by no other way, save through the pass, which would enable him to reach the Indian camp before them.

Colonel Kent was now keenly anxious about his chief of scouts. He had full confidence in Texas Jack's ability, and knew he would make no mistake as guide and scout; but Buffalo Bill's very presence with a command inspired confidence, even in defeat.

He had not wished, as we have seen, to go on the expedition, but when he found it necessary to do so he had gone into it heart and soul, like an intrepid soldier that he was.

It appeared to Colonel Kent, and to the scouts, that the non-appearance of Cody, as planned, indicated that some harm had befallen him.

The command pushed on through the darkness, cavalry in front and rear, the infantry and artillery in between, and the scouts well in advance, all faithfully guided by the dauntless and vigilant Texas Jack.

At last word came back from the front that the advance scouts were within two miles of the Indian camp, and the command came to a halt.

The horses were unsaddled for a few minutes to rest their backs, the men looked to their weapons, the infantry threw themselves down for a rest, and thus half an hour passed while Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill's Bedouins were reconnoitering about the Indian village.

Still Cody did not appear, and as the scouts did not report him in the front, more

and more anxiety was felt regarding his safety.

At last Texas Jack sent word for Colonel Kent to please come to the front.

He had found a point from which the lay of the village or camp could be seen, and not a quarter of a mile from it.

"Here is the place for the guns, Jack," decided the officer.

"Yes, colonel."

"I will need the cavalry on either flank, and the infantry in the center to take position, and have the guns open with three shells each. Then the command can charge into the village, which the artillery will throw into a panic."

"Yes, colonel; but, somehow, I do not like the looks of things over in the village."

"How do you mean, Jack?"

"Well, sir, the fires appear to have been freshly built, while, if they had been burning since dark, they would have been low now."

"True; but what does that indicate?"

"I may be wrong, sir, but I do not see a soul in the village, and in so large a one as that is, it is strange, for they are all not dead."

"Well?"

"I fear, sir, that they have heard of our coming and have deserted the village."

"How could they?"

"It does not take an Indian family long to pack up and get out, sir, especially when they wish to fly from danger, or perpetrate an act of cunning."

"And if they have gone, Jack?"

"Well, sir, they went because they were warned, and the women and children are retreating to some secure place in the mountains where we dare not follow them."

"That means that the braves have not departed?"

"It does, sir, for they, with their people safe, will be free to attack us on our retreat."

"Well, we came here to attack the village, so I shall do so, and we will soon know the result," said the colonel, and, turning to two staff officers near, he ordered them to place the artillery in position, and send the infantry and cavalry to attack according to his plan.

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE INDEED.

The staff officers quickly fulfilled their missions, and it did not take the well-disciplined command long to take up their separate positions.

It was after midnight, and the village was as quiet as a graveyard; but, there were scores of fires burning brightly, which, to Texas Jack, looked exceedingly suspicious, for it was not cold, and red-skins do not build big fires in their camp late at night.

Another most suspicious sign to Texas Jack, and which he made known to Colonel Kent, was that not a single dog was heard to bark, and certainly this was ominous.

The colonel commented upon this, and said:

"You scouts are as well trained in cunning and signs, Jack, as soldiers are in tactics, for that suspicion about the dogs is certainly one to consider, and I believe now with you, that the village has been deserted. But, we will soon know."

The guns were now in position, and, at an order from the colonel, as the cavalry and infantry had also reported ready, the guns burst forth in loud reports, that echoed through the mountains with startling effect.

The shells burst over the Indian village, and the gunners were about to fire again, when the colonel called out:

"Cease firing!"

Then he added:

"You were right, Texas Jack; the Indians have been warned and the village is deserted."

"Let the cavalry move into the camp, and you, Texas Jack, throw out your scouts, so that we will not be surprised by an attack."

"Has Cody come in yet?"

"No, sir; no one has seen him," came the answer.

The cavalry moved into the village unmolested, for not a red-skin was there to fire a shot!

Then the command went into bivouac until morning, all disappointed at not having surprised the cunning red skins.

When the sun arose it revealed that the village was strongly located in a valley on the top of a mountain range.

There was plenty of water, grass and timber, and the approaches were but few and could be well guarded, if the coming of a foe was known.

The Indians had taken no chances of defending their village, but had quietly slipped away further into the mountains to some other fastness.

That they had gone in haste there was every evidence, for though all the tepees had been left standing, in some were blankets, robes, provisions and even fire-arms, left in their alarm and hurrying.

The village showed that its population had been several thousands, and that as many ponies and cattle had grazed in the valley meadows the scouts reported was the case.

But, braves, women, children, horses and cattle had all been successfully run off by several trails leading into the mountains.

"You will camp here until to-morrow, sir, I suppose?" observed Texas Jack when he reported at noon to the colonel.

"Yes, we will start back early to-morrow."

"Then I will follow up the separate trails for some distance, sir, to see if the braves do not branch off to flank us upon our retreat."

"Do so, Jack, for we must not be ambushed on our way back."

"But you have heard nothing of Cody, or seen any sign to indicate that he was captured by those who warned the village of our coming?"

"No, sir; and I fear he has met with some accident, for the chief is as sure as Time to keep an appointment."

"Such is my fear also; but, what do you think of my sending a force on into the mountains?"

"Don't do it, sir. Let the scouts go. They may run into an ambush, but if you divided the command the whole force of braves might pounce upon it and wipe it out, for they are watching us, sir, you may be certain."

"Then I will remain here, and must be content with having taken the Indian village and destroyed it. Our coming will show the red-skins we are prepared to punish them for their raids upon the settlers and the wagon-trains," said the colonel.

Saluting, Texas Jack went to the scouts' camp, divided his men into four parties—one to remain with the command, and the others to go off on the three trails by which the Indians had retreated.

"I only wish Chief Cody was here, but I will do the best I can," said Texas Jack to his Bedouins.

The three parties of trailers set off on their mission, while all wore a look of gloom at the uncertain fate of their chief, for Buffalo Bill was the idol of his men, and it had begun to be feared by all that he had been killed.

Texas Jack alone seemed hopeful, for he had seen Buffalo Bill turn up safe and sound so many times, when he had been given up as dead or captured, he still had faith in his again showing the truth of the saying that W. F. Cody was born under a lucky star and would never be killed by an Indian.

It was just before dawn that the scouts began to return to the Indian village, and each detachment had the same report to make—that the Indians had not branched off from the retreating force, as far as any trails could be found.

They had followed the trails until dusk, and not anywhere could a sign be found where the braves had left the main body to flank around and ambush their foes upon the retreat.

At sunrise the command struck out on the return march to the fort, after having burned the tepees and destroyed what the red-skins had left of any value to themselves.

The column marched slowly, and camped early, the scouts still reporting no signs of the red-skins about them.

But, the next morning, as the troops entered the basin where the different valley trails met, and neared the pass, a canyon a couple of miles in length, cutting through a range, and with lofty, unscalable cliffs of

rock on either side, Texas Jack suddenly called out:

"Halt! The whole command is ambushed!"

"We are hemmed in, in front and rear!"

CHAPTER V.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

WITH such a prisoner as the Wild Avenger, Buffalo Bill felt that he was in an awkward position.

The giant's strength was to be feared, and his quickness in the use of weapons made him an "ugly customer" to handle.

True, Cody felt that he could kill him with a single quick shot, but his was not the nature to take life unless imperative necessity compelled.

If he shot the man down he would doubtless be doing mankind a favor, for the wild man had avowed himself as a hater of the army, and asserted his purpose to kill his fellow-men.

Naturally he was to be looked upon as a renegade to his own race and if dealt with as such it would not be cruelty.

Still, the scout wished not to try conclusions of a deadly strife with the man, but preferred to take him to the command, a prisoner, if he could do so.

For once Buffalo Bill had met one man whom there was reason for him to dread, powerful as he was in physical strength, and the deadliest of dead shots; but he knew not fear, and only felt that he must be over-cautious in handling a man who was dangerous as a wild beast in the jungle.

Who was the mysterious creature?

In his life in that part of the country the scout had not heard of him.

True, there were rumors of Mormon avengers roaming about the frontier, striking at the lives of soldiers and army trainmen, but Buffalo Bill had always taken these stories with allowance; he did not believe all he heard against the Mormons, though he was well aware that there were among them a considerable number of bad men who were ready for any deed of crime.

Whether these ruffians were Mormons or Gentiles, they were always said to be the former.

But in this giant man of mystery Buffalo Bill found an unknown quantity, and did not know just what he had to deal with, other than that he was an acknowledged foe of the army.

He looked upon him as a bad man, for looks, attire, words all indicated this, and as such he was to be pitied for his misfortune.

So the scout bade his prisoner precede him back from the cliff, holding him under cover of his revolver.

The man obeyed with an humble manner, and the look of one who was utterly crushed.

He seemed to realize that he had met his match, and went along at the scout's bidding, with no show of resistance.

Back from the cliff a quarter of a mile they came to where Buffalo Bill had left his horse.

He ordered the man to halt near the animal, and, fearful lest he might break away from him, forcing him to fire, Buffalo Bill decided to bind him with his lariat.

So far he had not disarmed him, but, turning to him, he did so, lifting the revolvers and knife from the rope belt.

Then he took the coiled lariat from his saddle-horn, and bade the man place his hands behind him.

The giant made no resistance to being disarmed, but stood with drooped head and downcast eyes.

Twice the scout ordered him to put his hands behind him before he obeyed; then he started, gave a sigh and did so.

Buffalo Bill stepped behind him to bind the hands together, and to do so had to place his revolver in his belt; when, quick as a flash, the giant form leaped backward, the force felling Buffalo Bill to the ground, and with the celerity of a tiger spring he was upon the scout.

Buffalo Bill rallied with great nerve, and as quickly as had been the movement of his foe.

He had no time, then, to draw a weapon, so grasped the man with all his force and at once began the desperate fight for mastery.

It was indeed a battle of giants.

Never, among the men with whom he had come in contact—and they, too, were giants—had Buffalo Bill met his master.

He was quicker, stronger and more wiry than those with whom he had tested his strength.

He had fought for life time and again, writhing in deadly combat with red-skin and desperado, and had always been the victor.

He had been the king of all athletic sports among his fellows, and his powers of endurance were phenomenal.

But now he felt that he had one whose sinews were of steel, and bones were of iron.

His flesh was as hard as the bark of a tree, and when Buffalo Bill was able to get in now and then one of his terrible blows, full upon the man's head, it did not seem to in the least degree harm him.

Over and over they rolled, the scout trying in vain to grasp the revolvers and knife in his belt, the Mad Nemesis seeming not to care for either.

The latter struck no blow, did not seek to clutch the throat of the scout in his iron grip, only fought to conquer by mere strength and endurance.

The minutes passed away and still the giants fought, the Mad Nemesis for his life, for the scout would have killed him now if he could, and his foe for mastery.

But human endurance has its limit, and at last the size, weight and iron strength of the madman triumphed.

Buffalo Bill had met his master in a struggle for victory.

CHAPTER VI.

A PRISONER FOR DEATH.

ONE thing Buffalo Bill had taken note of, through the whole terrible ordeal of his death struggle with the huge foe he was battling with, and that was that the man did not appear to wish to kill him, or to harm him, seriously.

Several times the scout had noticed that he had been at the mercy of the giant, as far as a death-blow was concerned, for the Hercules had it thus come his way to kill, had he so wished.

But this he did not do; and when at last Buffalo Bill could struggle no more and was helpless, the giant did not strike then, but drew to him the scout's lariat and secured him with it.

Then he sat down to rest, for he, too, was panting like a hard run hound.

He gazed with curiosity upon his enemy, mingled with admiration at his great strength, and seemed to realize that it had been the battle of his life; that never before had he met one whom he could not handle as he would a child.

After resting for many minutes he rose to his feet and glanced about him.

Buffalo Bill had rested also, but his broad breast still heaved convulsively, and he gazed at his enemy with curiosity, not devoid of anxiety as to his next move, for the scout remembered that Colonel Kent's command was marching on to attack the Indian village, and he was fearful that a warning might be sent the red-skins of their danger, for certainly this wild rover of the mountains must be their ally.

When he felt himself again, the Nemesis took hold of the lariat that bound the scout, unbound his feet and said:

"Get up!"

The scout did so.

"Come with me!"

"Where?"

"To death!"

Such an ominous reply would have unnerved many a man utterly, but with Buffalo Bill it was different, and he said in an indifferent tone:

"So you are going to kill me, eh?"

"I am going to leave you to die."

"Why?"

"You are my foe."

"We never met before."

"You are a soldier."

"Well, for the sake of argument, I'll admit it, as I belong to the army."

"Then you are by that admission my sworn foe."

"I do not just see how."

"I hate soldiers; I slay them whenever it is in my power; so you shall die."

"How have I ever wronged you?"

"You are a soldier."

"A scout more properly speaking."

"You belong to the army."

"I am proud to say that I do."

"Then you must die."

"Why did you not kill me when it was in your power to do so?"

"I saved you for a worse fate than sudden death."

"Ah! and what?"

"I have seen an army of soldiers go by in the canyon?"

"Granted."

"They have but one motive."

"Well?"

"It is to attack the village of the red-men who are my friends."

"Then you are a renegade?"

"Yes, if so you wish to call me, I am a renegade."

"And go against your race to aid others?"

"The one are my foes, the others my friends."

"But I must not linger here, for I have work to do."

"Lead on, for as I can do nothing else, I will follow."

"No, you will remain here."

"All right; I have no say in the matter."

"I shall tie you to a tree—that tree yonder, beyond all chance of escape."

"Well?"

"I will leave you there while I take your horse and weapons."

"To the victor belong the spoils," was the scout's indifferent response.

"I seldom mount a horse, for I am fleet of foot and have the strength to endure; but your horse shall bear me up a valley where I know a trail that will shorten the distance to the Indian village."

"See, I tell you all, for I am sure of your death."

"You are very kind."

"Your horse will save me a twenty mile run, and I shall ride him hard, ride him until he drops dead, and then I shall run on my way on foot, and reach the Indian village in time to warn them of danger."

"And what will you do with me?"

"I will leave you here, bound to that tree, to await the retreat of the soldiers; then I will bring the red-skins here to show them that I am indeed their friend, that I have captured their terrible foe, Buffalo Bill."

"You have the advantage of me in more ways than one, for you know me."

"Yes, I know you as Buffalo Bill, one whom the Indians fear as they do the Evil Spirit—one whom they have long wished to capture."

"They will come and find you here, and will take you to their village, where you will be burned at the stake."

"A cheerful prospect, surely. But how is it that you know me?"

"There is but one Buffalo Bill, and you are that one."

"Now, as I cannot lose time by taking you with me, I will see that you are here when I return for you."

It was useless to resist, so Buffalo Bill calmly submitted to be bound to a tree in such a way that to free himself was impossible, for his back was placed against it, and his hands stretched back and tied tightly, his feet then being made fast.

He uttered no word, no appeal, and saw the giant avenger mount his splendid horse and dash away at a speed to kill, leaving him alone and a prey to the terrible thoughts that could not but crowd upon him.

CHAPTER VII.

A MUFFLED FORM.

WHAT a situation for any man, to be helplessly bound in a wilderness, and left to await the coming back of a foe who had said that he would return with those who would lead his victim away to a fate worse than to remain there and starve to death, or even be torn by wolves.

Buffalo Bill saw the man ride away like the wind, and knew that he would keep his threat and ride his noble horse to death, in

his determination to warn the red-skins of the coming attack of the soldiers.

The scout did not break down, however, with despair, and in spite of his own suffering and danger, he thought of his comrades.

"That man will warn the red skins, and Colonel Kent and his command will march into a trap.

"The giant is a fiend, and he will lead the Indians to wipe out the command if in their power, and though I do not believe they can do that, the brave soldiers will suffer terribly in the retreat.

"And I am left here unable to aid, or to warn them—by Jove, but I'm unable to aid myself," and the scout's face was illumined by a grim smile as he uttered the words.

The situation was a novel one. Always the victor, he was, for once, the vanquished. What was more, he was left to his own bitter meditations over the untoward fortune of his capture.

If he could only release himself he would be able to take the command, for he could trot along like an Indian for half a day without tiring.

Once warned that he could not surprise the Indian village, Colonel Kent was too good a soldier to go on, but would return to the fort.

Tugging at his bonds Buffalo Bill only found how thoroughly secured they were.

The madman, as he regarded him, had been only too expert in binding him, and a team of horses could not have broken the raw hide lasso.

Once he was sure of this the scout began to consider his own case.

He was certainly in a very desperate situation, for, once the madman had warned the red-skin village he would return to him, and not alone; he would come with foes whom the noted and feared scout had every reason to dread.

More: he would come with braves who would harass every foot of the trail the soldiers retreated by, and maybe destroy the whole command in detail.

The day wore away; the sun glared in the face of the bound scout as it neared the horizon; a huge snake crawled by, near him, going to his night den; and as twilight fell, a wolf howled dismally not far away, as though calling his mates to a feast of human flesh.

The scout still stood against the tree, his hands and feet swelling under the tightening ropes, and his body becoming racked with pain from the impeded circulation of the blood.

Darkness came on and the hoot of an owl in a tree near by sounded doubly dismal to the suffering victim.

Then there came another long howl of a wolf, and it was answered from afar by the sharper yelp of a coyote.

An hour more passed and the chorus of the wolves had begun in earnest.

The howling of the finder of a feast of human flesh had brought answer from all sides, and as the night wore on there was heard the yelping of the hungry animals from every direction.

Buffalo Bill had tracked the forest all his life, and never had he felt dread of wolves before; he had slept alone upon the prairie and in the mountains countless of times, without an atom of apprehension; but, there he was free to defend himself, now he was bound and helpless!

He began to feel that the ravenous wolves would attack him as soon as they felt that he was at their mercy.

A single shot would have sent them flying; a brand of burning wood thrown into their midst would have sent them scampering away; but, now, alas! he was at their mercy.

They grew bolder and bolder, and at last came so near that he could see their eyes glitter.

Then he uttered a wild shout, and off they ran, but not to go far. They quickly returned, and sat on their haunches howling in chorus as if chanting the death chant.

"It is a question of time only," the prisoner muttered; "but, to be torn to pieces by their sharp teeth is no worse than being tortured to death; in fact, not so bad," and the scout awaited his fate, with grim fortitude.

The night wore on until at last Buffalo Bill felt that it was but a question of a few

minutes more, and he closed his eyes, to open them suddenly, as with startled yelps the wolves dashed away.

What had caused their flight the scout soon ascertained; some one was approaching!

A man or woman or ghost it might be for all that Buffalo Bill could tell, for the form was closely muffled from head to foot, and came gliding straight toward him, as silent as a shadow.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNKNOWN RESCUER.

For an instant Buffalo Bill believed that it was a creature of his imagination that he saw.

But no! the whole terrible pack of wolves had gone, and the muffled form was there before his eyes!

Who was it?

What did its coming portend for him?

Did the person know of his presence there?

Yes, the muffled form came straight to him, showed no surprise, uttered no word, and passing behind him quickly unbound the lariat, thoroughly as it was fastened about hands, feet and tree.

"Who are you, my good friend?" asked Buffalo Bill, as the form bent over the knots at his feet.

There was no answer.

"Who is my brave rescuer, may I ask?" Buffalo Bill repeated.

Still no answer.

Then the scout gazed at the form more closely.

He thought at first that it might be the Giant Madman, returned to release him, after having given him a scare.

But no, it was a slender form, not near so tall as was the madman.

From head to feet, enveloped in a blanket, the form was, the eyes looking out through holes in the covering of the face, and the hand was visible working at the ropes, and also coming through cuts in the covering about the form.

"You may be a ghost, for all I know, but be you what, or who you may, I thank you," said the scout earnestly.

Still no reply from the muffled form.

"Say, pard, don't you think we ought to get acquainted, as you've got it all your way now?" said Buffalo Bill in his off-hand way of speaking so natural to him.

Still no reply.

"All right; have your own way, for I will not quarrel with you, you bet!" said the scout.

The muffled and unknown Samaritan had moved around behind the tree and seemed busy there with the lariat.

Then the scout noticed that there was no longer any tugging at his bonds.

He moved his hands and they were free!

He raised one foot!

It was also free!

He moved the other, and it was also no longer bound!

He stepped forward, but his numbed and swollen limbs would not now support him and down he fell.

With an effort he arose and looked for his unknown rescuer.

He or she was not to be seen!

The stars gave light enough for him to see that the muffled form was not hiding behind the tree, and was nowhere seen now.

Buffalo Bill did not understand it all; but, he was free and that was enough, just then!

He remembered that there was a stream of water just at the base of the hill, and proceeded to make his way painfully there.

A good drink of the cool water revived him, and then, pulling off his boots and socks, he put his feet into the swift flowing current and at the same time began to bathe his swollen hands.

The effect seemed magical, for the pains ceased, and soon the swelling began to go down.

"I must get away from here as soon as I can, for there is work for me to do.

"But who in the mischief was that deaf and dumb ghost that set me free?" he muttered.

Having let his feet remain for half an hour

in the water he rubbed them dry and drew on his socks and boots.

Then he stood for a moment in deep meditation.

"Well, I am free, but unarmed, without a horse, without food and forty very long miles to the fort.

"Now I could not catch the command, and if I did I could do no good, for it's about this time that the attack is to be made, and nearly fifty miles lie between me and the Indian village.

"If the colonel did not surprise the red skins, and I am sure he did not, he'll be worsted and soon be on the retreat, and he may need aid before he reaches the fort.

"If not worsted where he expects to surprise, he will surely be ambushed on his retreat, so my plan is to go to the fort with all haste and get a force to march to his relief—but what in thunder was it that set me free, I should like to know."

No longer fearing the wolves, and though on foot and disarmed, Buffalo Bill at once started on his way to the fort.

At first he limped along with much pain; then the blood began to circulate freely and he walked better and better until after an hour, he began to trot in the swinging way he had learned from the Indians.

Day dawned then and found him well on his way on the track trail.

"I shall not be worried halting for breakfast," he muttered, tightening his armless belt a couple of holes.

"I should make the fort this afternoon by four," he muttered, "for I've struck a very fair pace for a man as stiff as an old cavalry horse; but won't somebody tell me who that was who set me free, for I owe him, her or it, a lifelong gratitude."

And still trying to solve the riddle of who his unknown rescuer had been Buffalo Bill kept steadily on in his run for the fort, for he knew that the lives of many brave men might depend upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCOUT'S TIDINGS.

THE next in command of the fort to Colonel Kent, and commanding in his absence, was Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Grayson of the infantry.

He was a fine officer, and had come to the fort in command of the infantry battalion sent there.

He had with him at the fort his wife and daughter, and his home was a most popular and hospitable one.

With Colonel Kent he had disapproved of this expedition against the Indian village, and felt very anxious when he saw the command depart.

After they had left, Lieutenant-Colonel Grayson had discussed the matter with Major Rafael Roy, who had come to Fort Vale in command of the two light batteries, and was the third in rank there.

The major was a bachelor, handsome, rich, a dashing soldier, and liked by all.

He, too, had urged against the expedition, and had said:

"Let me go, Colonel Kent, and you remain here, for I am a bachelor, you know, so can easily be spared if the red-skins mop up the mountains with the command."

"No, Roy; my orders are to take two-thirds of my command and strike the Indian village and give them a quietus."

"Yes, that is the way orders come from men sitting in pleasant quarters in Washington, telling us who are on the field here how to fight the Indians," the major had answered, and with regret he had seen the expedition depart.

It was the afternoon of the second day after the command had departed, that the lieutenant-colonel, and major were seated in the latter's pleasant cabin quarters, when an orderly reported that a man on foot, and in a run was seen coming across the plain toward the fort.

"Send a man with a led horse, for him, so that he will not have to climb the hill on foot," ordered the lieutenant-colonel, and it was done, a soldier riding out leading a saddled horse.

He was soon seen approaching up the steep trail, and the officer of the day, leveling his glass upon the stranger, called out:

"Corporal, report at once to Colonel Grayson that the man is chief of scouts Buffalo Bill."

The corporal dashed away and returned with orders for Buffalo Bill to come at once to the major's quarters.

At that moment the mounted soldier rode into the fort, with Buffalo Bill riding the led horse.

"Ho, Cody, something has gone wrong, to see you back alone, and on foot," said the officer of the day.

"I have news for Colonel Grayson, and my horse failed me, sir," was the answer of the scout, whose haggard appearance all could not but see, though he had answered calmly.

"Colonel Grayson wishes you to come at once to Major Roy's quarters," answered the officer, and Buffalo Bill rode rapidly on, and dismounting, was at once admitted by the orderly.

"My God, Cody, what has happened? Are you wounded?" cried Colonel Grayson, as the scout struggled and dropped heavily into a chair, as he gasped:

"No, sir, only tired out, for I have hoofed it for forty miles at a run."

Instantly a glass of brandy was handed to him by the major, and Colonel Grayson said:

"Drink it, and you need food, too; then you can talk."

The major's man soon found something for the scout to eat, and finishing with a hot cup of coffee, he rallied quickly and began his story.

"Yes, colonel, now I can talk, but I did not know how hungry and tired I was."

"I'll tell you just what has happened, sir; but first let me ask you, upon my responsibility, to order about half your force, in fact every man you can spare, to go to the relief of Colonel Kent, and I will guide them."

"And I will command them, Grayson," cried the major.

"All right, Roy, go and get your men together, for you can hear the story afterward."

"Take fully three hundred men, and mount the infantry so they can travel rapidly."

"Better take three light guns with you, also, for we will need but a small force here."

The major was gone in an instant, and then making Buffalo Bill take the easiest chair in the room, the colonel told him he was ready for his whole story.

Then the scout told just what had happened to the astonished officer, who commented here and there upon what he heard, and finally remarked:

"You did just what was right, Cody, in coming to the fort, and first telling me to order the men to get ready on your responsibility, as every moment may count."

"You deserve more than praise, and have accomplished more than I thought man could."

"Now go to your quarters and get rest, for you need it badly."

"Oh, no, sir; I'm all right, and will guide the expedition back."

"You are not able to. Don't try, Cody!"

"Indeed I am able, sir, and I'll go to my quarters and freshen up, get some more weapons, a horse, and will be ready in half an hour; but I do wish I knew who it was that set me free."

"So do I," assured the colonel.

In little over an hour after the arrival of Buffalo Bill at the fort, he rode out again to guide the expedition to the rescue of Colonel Kent and his men.

CHAPTER X.

LYING IN WAIT.

MAJOR RAFAEL ROY was glad of his chance to go to the rescue of his colonel and comrades, and he had quickly rallied his men, inspiring them with his spirit and determination.

He had been given free rein by Colonel Grayson to take all the men he wanted, and he quickly ordered three light guns gotten ready with their caissons, two troops of cavalry and three more companies of infantry, the latter mounted, and a number of

scouts and some of the Cowboy Rangers before alluded to.

In all he had about three hundred men, and packing provisions in ambulances, instead of heavy army wagons, he knew he could travel rapidly.

He was much pleased when Buffalo Bill reported to him for duty, as he did not think the scout able to go, and said:

"I fear you have over-taxed your strength already, Cody."

"Oh, no, sir; I am only tired and sleepy."

"I can sleep in the saddle on the march, after I tell you what to expect, and will be all right, soon."

"Well, you have got will and nerve to master much, Cody," declared the major, and then as they rode along, the chief of scouts setting the pace, he heard the story that Buffalo Bill had made known to Colonel Grayson.

"Well, Bill, I hardly know how to congratulate you upon your escape."

"You certainly are a man of luck, and it will be a great thing if by your defeat by the madman you are able, through our going to the rescue, to save the command."

"But now tell me just what your idea is of our advance?"

"Well, sir, it is of course only my opinion; but I fear, warned by the mad giant, that Colonel Kent, expecting to surprise the Indian village, will in turn be surprised."

"And defeated: but what does he think of your mysterious absence?"

"That I am dead, sir, or I would have been there, for my men know that I am not one to fail them."

"True."

"Now, granted that the command is defeated, Cody?"

"Well, sir, it will be a defeat that will hurt, but Colonel Kent is too good an officer to allow his men to be demoralized or over-ridder, and he will extricate them and retreat and just then is where aid will come in."

"Yes, they will need our support most surely, and we may be able to give the Indians a lesson with our combined force."

"Yes, sir, for the red skins will be elated, and as the command will retreat in compact order, the fear is that they may march into an ambush, for there are numbers of places where the red skins can get ahead and strike terrible blows with but little risk to themselves."

"Ah! I see."

"There is where we will come in well, in driving the red-skins from their ambushes?"

"Yes, sir, and I will keep well ahead in the morning with my men, so as not to run in an ambush from this direction, but to find out where the red-skins are and surprise them."

"If we only can; but you must be very careful, Cody."

"I will be, sir; but at what time will you camp?"

"When do you say?"

"I think, sir, the red-skins will make a stand at the pass. We can camp so as to reach them early to-morrow, for I know a good camping ground."

"All right; you know best, Cody."

It was now some time after nightfall, and soon the command went into camp some twenty miles from the fort.

Tired as he was, Buffalo Bill rode on ahead with a dozen of his scouts and went into a fireless camp not very far from the pass.

Giving orders that two of the men should start out a couple of hours before dawn on foot, to reconnoiter the pass, Buffalo Bill gladly turned into his blankets for much needed rest.

It was just at sunrise that one of the two scouts sent in advance during the night came to the little camp and reported that the Indians were at the pass in very large force.

"I left Dockery to watch them, sir, and came back to report to you," said the scout.

Buffalo Bill had awakened thoroughly rested, but a little stiff and sore from his being bound and his long run.

But, he was at once ready for action, and said:

"That settles it, for we can go no further than the pass; but we can attack the Indians there and surprise them, and

our guns will warn Colonel Kent so that he won't march into the ambush."

Then he ordered one of the men to go with all haste back to Major Roy and report what the situation was, asking him to push on rapidly, as he feared Colonel Kent was not very far away in his retreat, while the Indians being in hiding was proof that the command was all right, or at least able to make their way back.

As soon as he had eaten a hearty breakfast Buffalo Bill went ahead on foot, accompanied by several of his men, and ordering the rest to remain in camp with the horses saddled and ready.

He had just secured a good position, from which he could see the Indians, for they were not in hiding from their rear, expecting no danger from that quarter, when Scout Dockery came up and said:

"The command must be near, sir, for the Indians have been taking position, evidently warned of the colonel's coming by their scouts."

"Then Colonel Kent must be warned," was Buffalo Bill's emphatic rejoinder.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT'S RESOLUTION.

THE scouts looked at their chief in surprise at his words, for how could the coming command be warned?

The Indians occupied the cliffs of the pass, and it was certainly not possible to elude their vigilance and get by them, and that was about the only way that the colonel could be notified of his danger.

But Buffalo Bill was considering, and his face showed that he was planning some bold move.

Major Rafael Roy was yet miles away, and Colonel Kent was reaching the pass even sooner than the chief of scouts had anticipated.

If he reached the pass even a few moments before the major came up it would be time for the Indians to open upon him from ambush, and that would mean a great loss of life even if the soldiers were able to punish the red skins severely afterward.

So it was that Buffalo Bill was considering.

He knew the pass well.

It was a canyon a couple of miles in length, here and there widening almost into a valley, but with walls of rock all along, rising to the height of from seventy to two hundred feet.

The average width of the canyon was a little over a hundred yards, and the Indians would not expose themselves but take up position upon the cliffs on either side.

From considering the chief of scouts took to reconnoitering.

He sent another scout back to the camp, telling him to run all the way, and then mount his horse and go and urge Major Roy to come on at full speed.

This done, he took two men with him to a point as far as he dared advance toward the red-skins' position.

All then began to take in the situation with their glasses from their different points of observation, and when they again met Buffalo Bill asked quickly:

"Well, what have you seen?"

"There are all of a thousand red-skins in ambush, chief."

"Yes, all of that," said the second man.

"Where were they stationed?"

"Back from the cliffs in the timber, as I could see in through the gaps."

"Yes, but they had some scouts on the watch to call them, when they should run to the edge of the cliffs," said the other scout.

"Yes, and they know that the colonel is not very far away, and will run to the cliffs on signal of the scouts."

"Now I was on the cliffs on the right of the canyon on our way up the other day, and I notice that the Indians have piled all along a great many stones, from the weight of a pound to ten and twenty pounds, just where, on account of a deep rut in the trail the command must march close under the cliff."

"Here the attack is to be made, and the soldiers thus caught, and with stones rained

down upon them, will be literally murdered in their tracks."

"It looks that way, chief."

"It is that way, and the colonel must never be allowed to go into such a trap."

"I do not see how it can be prevented."

"We could fire our rifles and revolvers and warn him trouble was ahead, but I fear he would press on the more rapidly, thinking a party from the fort was in danger, and the Indians, in their numbers, would not dread our small force, and so would still hold their point of vantage on the cliff."

"I do not see what we can do, chief."

"I do."

"Well, sir, I am ready."

"And I."

"I know that, my brave parads, but this is a work I have cut out for myself, so you, Nat, go with all speed back to camp and bring my horse as far as you dare do so in this direction, and I will meet you, while you, Baldy, go on back to meet Major Roy, and tell him to begin to shell the timber and cliffs, upon nearing here, and dislodge the Indians, while, to save Colonel Kent from going into the trap, I have gone to run the gantlet and warn him."

"Oh, chief, you can never do it!"

"Don't make the mad attempt, Chief Cody."

"I will try, and take my chances, which are good, for only the scouts are on the cliffs at the other end of the canyon, and before the braves get there from the timber, I will be through."

In vain did the two scouts urge Buffalo Bill not to attempt to make the desperate run, for he had made up his mind to do so.

Nothing could change his purpose, and the two men could but obey his stern orders to them, and twenty minutes after his splendid horse had been brought to him and he was ready to ride the deadly gantlet.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNFORTUNATE STAMPEDE.

MAJOR RAFAEL ROY had encamped like a good soldier, with sentinels out, and the men in position to call into action at a moment's notice of danger.

The camp was in some timber in a pretty valley, on the banks of a small stream, and there was a fine piece of meadow land near, where the horses were corralled to feed, with guards around them to keep them from straying, for it was not thought that on the morrow they would get much to eat, or time to enjoy it if grass was found.

It was just as the camp was preparing for the move, and the horse-wranglers were going to drive up the stock, that a sound was heard like distant thunder.

All stood still and listened.

Was it a charge of Indian horsemen down upon the camp?

For a moment all thought so.

Then a scout called out:

"It is a herd of buffaloes on a stampede!"

"Look out all for the horses!"

But the warning came a few minutes too late, for in the darkness a huge black wave was surging down the valley, and the next instant there were thousands of buffaloes dashing right toward the meadow where the horses were being rounded up by the men.

With wild snorts the frightened horses stampeded, the men in vain trying to check them.

Down the valley they dashed like mad-dened beasts, ahead of the mighty herd of buffaloes.

Fortunately, there were a few experienced men on the lower side of the horses, and these, recognizing that to check the stampede was impossible, wisely dashed away on their own good animals and led it.

Urging their horses to their utmost speed, they gazed out ahead in the gloom in search for a canyon or small valley into which they could lead their drove of terrified animals.

At last they beheld one on the right, and into it they dashed.

The whole drove followed, and as the riders slackened their speed, and called loudly to the horses following, they began to check the alarm, and, as it was a blind

canyon into which they had ridden, with no outlet at the other end, the hundreds of horses at once came to a stand-still, though still trembling and listening excitedly to the roar of the buffalo herd as it dashed on down the valley.

The score of riders, who had so skillfully checked the drove of horses, quickly made their way to the entrance to the canyon, and ranged across it, served as a barrier to prevent the drove from dashing out again, while one man was sent at full speed to tell the cavalry and artillery soldiers to come after their own animals.

It was a couple of hours before the whole drove was roped in, and then the animals were led back to camp and harnessed and saddled quickly as possible, for a messenger from Buffalo Bill had come, urging the major to push forward with all speed.

"Cody has made some discovery, and needs us, and here we are detained here by that stampede."

"It seems that luck is against us, for I do not believe a herd of buffalo has been in these hills for years."

"But what a wild stampede it was, and those horse-wranglers deserve great credit for checking it as they did, for otherwise we would not have collected all of the animals in two days."

"But work lively, men, for we are wanted at the front."

So said Major Roy, and work lively the men all did, and the command pulled out of camp at a quick pace, but over three hours behind time.

The animals, too, were still very nervous, and the men had much trouble with them the first few miles of the march, thus delaying the command still more.

Another courier had come from Buffalo Bill, and Major Roy was getting anxious.

He had moved to the front with the cavalry, and was intending to dash ahead with a troop, leaving the rest to follow, when Buffalo Bill's third courier came up and told just what the chief of scouts had bid him say.

"My God, Cody will throw his life away, for no mortal man can run the gantlet of that pass," said the major, and every officer and man who knew just what the situation was agreed with him.

The last report from the chief of scouts, showed the major that he must advance with his entire command and begin the battle, so he at once made arrangements to do so.

The cavalry were in the advance, and the mounted infantry and artillery pressed close behind them until the scouts, camp was reached, where a line of battle was formed to begin action by shelling the cliffs with the guns.

"Where is Cody?" cried the major as he rode up to the camp of scouts.

"He has gone, sir, to ride the gantlet of the pass," was the answer.

"Poor fellow!"

"He has but ridden to his doom," the major said sorrowfully, and then gave the order for the advance.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EVIL SPIRIT.

WHEN the Mad Giant turned away from Buffalo Bill his face was that of a demon, so full was it of triumph and hatred.

He had leaped upon the horse of the scout, after having thrust his revolvers and bowie into his own belt, and with the rifle of Buffalo Bill slung at his back, he started off at a run on a trail with which he seemed to be thoroughly acquainted.

Reaching the valley there was the large trail left by the passing soldiers, and riding rapidly on the madman dashed through the long canyon, coming out some twenty minutes behind the rear end of the command.

Then he branched off sharply to the left, and rode ahead at a long sweeping gallop for miles.

Buffalo Bill's horse was a large, long-bodied, strong animal, with great speed and endurance, but after half a score of miles had been gone over, under the extra weight of the madman, his weapons, and the arms of the scout added, he began to feel the strain.

But he was not spared and still urged on at the same killing pace until a score of miles had been cast behind him.

The command had been passed by far to the right, darkness was near at hand, and yet the madman still urged the now very tired animal on.

Before him rose a range of mountains, and straight toward it he rode.

He was in a valley to the left of the command, and which apparently stopped at the range, there being no visible gap through it.

Darkness came on, but still the madman urged his horse, now able only to keep up a slow canter.

This came down to a trot as another mile was passed over, and as the range was reached the animal's strength failed utterly.

Leaping from his back the madman took off the saddle and bridle and turned him loose.

There he stood unable to move and panting violently.

But the rider had no mercy for him, and shouldering the bridle and saddle started off straight up the side of the range.

A climb of half a mile and he came to a narrow break in the range.

Here he halted, laid down the saddle and bridle and weapons of the scout, tightened his rope belt, and then started off through the narrow canyon at a long, running gait that would carry him along at a seven mile pace an hour on level land.

The canyon was a long and winding one, but came out upon the other side of the range, and overlooking a valley.

The darkness of the night did not for a moment check the madman's speed, for he bounded down the mountain-side with great leaps, reached the valley and again kept up his swift and steady gait for miles.

Then he began to ascend another range.

He seemed untiring and never once paused for rest.

An hour's climb brought him to the summit, and there he beheld a striking and picturesque scene.

It was a valley in the summit of the mountain range, and through the valley bounded a stream.

Upon each side of the stream, for several miles, glimmered camp-fires, and their light revealed a hundred of tepees.

It was the Indian village, where dwelt the great tribe of Utes, under their leader Death Hand, a bitter foe to the white Gentiles and soldiers yet who was accused of being a friend to the Mormons.

Whether the latter assertion was true or not, he certainly was greatly dreaded by Gentile settlers along the frontier, and gave the army no end of trouble, until at last it had been determined by the department commander to strike a blow at his tribe that would be long remembered.

Down the slope into the valley ran the madman, passing Indian braves here and there who gazed at him with awe, while, as he dashed by the tepees, women and children fled from him in terror.

All seemed to know him, and pale-face though he was not a hand was raised against him.

Seeming to know his way he ran on toward a cliff, at the base of which was some timber, and here were half a dozen large tepees.

A bright fire burned before one, and there were gathered half a dozen chiefs, one of whom, a very tall, sinewy red-skin, was decked out in all the regalia of a mighty chief.

"The Evil Spirit!" cried a number of voices as the madman dashed up to the group.

"Yes, the Evil Spirit I am, and come to warn you that the pale-face braves, a thousand strong, are marching upon your village, and are to attack you when the light drives the darkness away by hurling iron from their wheel guns into your midst."

"You have no time to fight them, so must retreat at once further into the mountains, and strike them before their retreat, for I will tell you where, when and how."

"The Evil Spirit has spoken," and the Giant Madman, having spoken in the Ute tongue, folded his arms calmly upon his broad breast, heaving violently from his long and rapid run.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVIL SPIRIT'S DISCOVERY.

THAT the Giant Madman held influence in the Indian tribe there was no doubt, from the manner in which the chiefs who heard his words regarded him.

They seemed to stand in awe of him, and even the mighty chief Death Hand was most respectful in his manner of addressing him.

"The Evil Spirit is welcome to my village, and he brings tidings to frighten the most of my women and children, though my young braves know no fear of their pale-face foes.

"But he tells me what my warriors do not know, and my scouts are abroad always."

"Then your scouts are asleep, or so intent on hunting for game as not to know what the pale-faces are doing.

"I tell you, chief, that not four hours ago I passed the pale-face warriors, on ponies, on foot, and with wheel-guns, crawling like a huge serpent through the mountains to attack your village.

"I saw your dread foe, Buffalo Bill, the pale-face Man of Many Scalps, as you call him and call me.

"We fought, and I was his master.

"I bound him with his own lariat to a tree, there to await my return with your warriors, and give him to them to burn at the stake.

"Then I took his horse and rode on after the crawling serpent of pale-faces.

"I passed them by, came on to the further range, left the horse of Buffalo Bill, and ran on foot here to tell you of your foes' coming.

"I tell you now you have no time to fight them, for they are many and would kill your young men and destroy your village.

"Retreat at once where they dare not follow you.

"Leave your tepees standing, throw wood upon your camp-fires, and let them attack a deserted village.

"When you have taken your women and children, your old people, crippled and sick to a place of safety, mount your bravest warriors upon your best ponies, flank around and head off at the pass the retreating pale-faces, and strike them there from ambush, and you will hear a wail of woe through the breasts of thousands of your foes.

"The Evil Spirit has no more to say.

"He has done his duty by his red brothers and is silent, but he will not remain here to die before the wheel-guns of the pale-faces whom he hates."

The words of the Mad Renegade made a decided impression, and without hesitation the great chief responded:

"The Evil Spirit has spoken well, and he is the white brother of my people.

"His words shall be obeyed.

"Let the alarm be given, and my people must move at once to the secret retreat further in the mountains."

The chiefs departed, the alarm was given, and braves, squaws and children worked hard to get ready for the retreat.

In an hour's time the retreat began, the cattle which had been stolen from the whites being first driven away along the mountain trails, the women and children following, the ponies packed with household goods, provisions and all that could be carried away, the sick, aged and wounded being on *travois*.

The tepees were left standing, the fires rebuilt, none dreaming that that very act would be read aright by Texas Jack, and the warriors brought up the rear, sullen, but hopeful of revenge in the near future.

The Evil Spirit rode away with Death Hand, and planned to act as they went along.

The Evil Spirit was known to the Indians only as a mad pale-face, and they respected one upon whom they believed the Great Spirit had laid the hand of affliction, to take away his mind.

They knew him as a wild man, as one who lived and roamed the mountains and valleys as a wild beast, the cruelist, bitterest foe of his own race for some reason.

This had made him their friend, and when he came to their village, as now and then he did, he was welcome, for once he had warned a party of their braves on the war-path of danger.

So the chief Death Hand listened to the plan of the Evil Spirit as they rode along.

It was to tell off the bands of braves, under their respective chiefs, as he wanted them to go and attack the soldiers.

Then he, the Evil Spirit, would guide them to the place where the blow could be struck at the command from ambush, and with little danger to themselves.

The great chief heard and was pleased, and he called his chiefs about him at the first halt, and they were given their orders, to get their braves together, and be ready to move at dawn, by a flank trail, to go to the scene of ambush.

So it was that two thousand mounted braves were on the march at early dawn for the pass, while the rest of the tribe went into camp among the mountain fastnesses where they knew that the soldiers dare not follow.

It was in the middle of the afternoon when the Evil Spirit and Death Hand, followed by the column of red-men, rode up to the place where Buffalo Bill had been left.

What a sight met their gaze.

There, hanging from the tree, bound by the fangs of a hundred wolves, that scattered snarling and yelping at the approach of the Indians.

The long dark hair, the clothes, boots and quivering flesh yet clinging to the bones told the story, and the madman cried with rage at having been thwarted:

"Great God! the wolves have devoured him!"

But the braves though disappointed at not finding the scout alive, rejoiced at the thought that their deadly foe was no more.

So they followed the Evil Spirit out to the cliffs, the ponies were left back in the valley, rocks were piled up all along the edge of the canyon as missiles, and the red-skins, leaving scouts on the watch, went back into hiding in the timber to await the call to battle.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WILD RIDER.

THE command under Colonel Kent had approached to within a short distance of the fatal pass, when Texas Jack, who was well in advance with his scouts, had grown suspicious and came to a halt.

There was no sign of a red-skin in sight, nothing to indicate danger ahead, only Texas Jack thought that he did not like the looks of things.

To him it seemed that the silence was too death-like, and so he halted.

"Boys, I don't like the looks of things here.

"Keep your eyes open all of you for the slightest sign that is suspicious," said Texas Jack.

All did so, a thorough reconnaissance was made, nothing was seen to cause alarm, and the band of scouts moved forward just as the head of the column came up.

"What is it, Texas Jack?" asked Colonel Kent as he rode up, accompanied by his staff officers.

"Nothing it seems, sir, only I do not like looks of things?"

"How so?"

"I can hardly tell, sir, any more than to say it is foreboding."

"Of what?"

"Well, sir, we are in the basin here, which narrows into the pass yonder, and if there should be an ambush in the canyon the command would suffer terribly and could do very little fighting back."

"Very true, but we must go forward."

"Yes, sir, I will move on with the scouts."

"No, for they would not bring the fire of the Indians upon them, as they would be allowed to go through, and the command following would catch the fire, so we will move forward in compact column and risk it, though why you think there is an ambush here I cannot understand."

"You see, sir, they have had ample time to flank around and get here, and somehow I felt the impression that they had done so."

"Well, we will have to chance it, for if we are attacked we still must go through to the fort."

Texas Jack saluted, moved ahead, and then called back:

"Allow me to reconnoiter ahead alone, sir, first."

"All right, if you wish."

Texas Jack rode on alone, the command following very slowly, and he was seen to cross the basin and reach the entrance to the narrow canyon.

Then he disappeared, and the command moved on.

At last the column came to a point where they could see for a long distance into the canyon.

As they looked they saw Texas Jack slowly riding back toward them.

They were moving forward once more, when he held up both hands warning them back.

The command halted, and, urging his horse to a gallop, Texas Jack came forward and called out, as has been seen:

"Halt!"

"We are ambushed ahead and in the rear!"

This was startling news, and as Texas Jack drew rein near the column he continued:

"I saw several Indians hiding in the cliffs ahead, sir, but made no sign that I had discovered them.

"As I turned back, I saw other Indians away back on the hills in our rear."

"Well, we are in close quarters, but must risk going through.

"I will order the cliffs shelled and then we can push ahead, and there may not be many red-skins after all," said Colonel Kent.

But, as he turned to give the order for the guns to unlimber for action, a shout arose and a number of soldiers pointed down the canyon.

Then all beheld a horseman coming at full speed toward them.

He was riding like the wind, and as they looked they saw flashes from the cliffs, heard the reports of rifles, and beheld the forms of Indians upon the heights above hurling stones down into the canyon to kill the daring rider.

"My God! it is Buffalo Bill that is running that deadly gantlet!" cried Colonel Kent who had his field glass to his eyes.

For an instant discipline was forgotten and a wild shout went up from the soldiers in admiration of Buffalo Bill's magnificent pluck, and all eyes were bent upon him as he came flying along.

They saw that his horse ran as though hurt, and the scout was bending low in the saddle, his feet free from the stirrups, as though prepared for a fall of the splendid animal that was bearing him.

Nearer and nearer he came, but nothing could be done to aid him, as to go to his relief would but be to place other lives in danger and without doing good.

Nearer and nearer he came, the shots, arrows and stones from the cliffs raining down upon him, but still he pressed on.

"He bears a charmed life!" cried an officer, and as he spoke the noble horse was seen to stumble, recover himself, and then fall.

But the scout caught nimbly on his feet, and ran on like a deer, shouting as he came closer:

"The cliffs are swarming with red-skins, and I came to warn you."

And such a mighty shout as went up for Buffalo Bill the brave scout felt repaid him for the deadly risk he had run.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TERRIBLE GANTLET.

BUFFALO BILL made his mind up to either give warning of the dangerous trap they were to march into to Colonel Kent, or perish in the attempt.

He had seen enough through reconnoitering to know that with hundreds of red-skins firing down upon the soldiers showers of arrows, rifle shots and a rain of rocks, the result in the crowd of men in the canyon would be terrible.

"Hundreds will fall, and doubtless among the first will be Colonel Kent," he argued to his men.

"You see," he continued, "the Indians will have every advantage, for they cannot be reached without a ride of several miles, and all the way they can pick off the soldiers and then escape to the ridges, if indeed they

are not in force enough to stand their ground.

"With the colonel warned he will keep out of the trap, can shell the cliffs with his guns, send the cavalry one way and the infantry another and catch the red-skins between two fires, for Major Roy, though delayed now by some reason, can help immensely in the attack, and the savages not expecting aid from the fort will be demoralized.

"Now you see, pards, the Indian scouts are only watching along the cliffs, the main force being back in the timber in hiding, so I will only have the gantlet of a few shots to run."

The scouts did not see it this way, for they knew that the few shots their chief referred to would be many before the end of the canyon was reached.

They knew that Buffalo Bill was taking all risks to save the lives of others, and they admired him the more for it, though they urged him not to go.

But the scout was determined, his mind was made up, and his horse having been brought up by one of the men he turned to mount without longer delay.

"If I go under, pards, tell the colonel I tried to do my best.

"I will leave my rifle, for I do not wish any extra weight to carry.

"Well, good-by, for I'm off."

With this he leaped into his saddle, gathered his reins well in hand, and with a nod was away.

He shot soon full into view of the cliffs, but as good luck would have it, he was not seen by the Indian scouts stationed there, as their eyes were all turned in the other direction.

He reached the entrance to the canyon, and not until the echo of the hoofs of his horse reached their ears did the Indians discover him.

Then they were nonplused for a minute.

They had looked for no one from the direction of the fort, and hardly knew what to do.

And all this time Buffalo Bill was sweeping along like the wind.

Then the red-skins supposed him to be a courier, carrying dispatches from the fort to the command that had gone to attack them.

Should they allow him to go by and not reveal their presence?

It seemed best to them to do so, and thus not give the alarm to Colonel Kent's command.

Whatever their intention in this respect it was quickly changed, and by one of their own number who revealed himself in seeking a better position for observation.

The quick eye of the scout glancing upward saw the Indian, the opportunity was too good to be lost, and throwing his revolver upward he pulled trigger as he sped swiftly along.

In spite of the long range and motion of his horse, the scout's aim was sure, and, with a wild yell of surprise and pain the Indian attempted to spring to cover but badly wounded staggered, reeled, and fell with a heavy thud into the canyon, causing Buffalo Bill's horse to bound wildly to one side in terror.

A shout from the scout, answering yells from the Indians, and a score of rifles rattled forth their leaden hail from along the cliffs.

Buffalo Bill's horse gave a bound as a bullet cut through his neck, and the scout felt a stinging pain in the shoulder that told him he was wounded, though he knew that it was slight.

Then he urged the horse onward the faster, and all along the cliffs the Indian scouts began to fire.

They must check the flight of the wild rider at all hazards.

Arrows were fired at him, bullets rattled about him, and rocks were hurled in showers to crush him.

But on he rode, as though indeed bearing a charmed life, and shot around a bend of the canyon into full view of those he had risked life to save.

Several times had his horse been hit by bullets, and two arrows hung in his haunches and the scout knew that he was falling him.

Once a bullet had slightly wounded the scout, another had passed through his hat, a third through his hunting-jacket, while several arrows were hanging in his clothing.

But still he rode on, until at last his horse fell beneath him.

But he caught on his feet, and flying onward as has been seen, rode the the terrible gantlet to the end, and a proud moment it was for him when he heard the cheers of the soldiers upon his magnificent achievement.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SEVERE DEFEAT.

THE first one to grasp Buffalo Bill's hand, as he dashed up, was Colonel Carrol Kent, and as he did so he cried:

"Splendidly done, Cody; but is it really you or your ghost, for we have mourned you as dead."

"No, colonel, I am still in the ring, though I did very nearly pass in my chips; but now I can only tell you that I ran the gantlet of the canyon to tell you that there are all of two thousand braves along the cliffs, back in the timber, and they are there to ambush you.

"But Major Roy, with three hundred men, and three guns, is not far from the other end of the canyon, and we were going to your aid, knowing you had failed to surprise the village, and must need help."

"We would have needed it first here, Cody, but for you; but bravo for Major Roy and his men, though how did he know we failed to surprise the village?"

"I told him, sir."

"You?"

"Yes, sir; oh, I knew it all, colonel, as you shall later hear.

"But as I know the lay of the land up on yonder cliffs, may I show you how to aim the guns, for you see the Indians have given up all hope of ambushing you now, and are going to close in on your rear and try and drive you into the canyon, where they will leave braves enough to greatly harm you, for they do not know that Major Roy is near."

"Good! then the biters will be bitten, and we will give them a surprise."

"Yes, tell Captain Baxter just where to aim his guns, and we'll begin work."

Captain Baxter listened attentively to Buffalo Bill's description of the land back from the cliffs, and where the Indians were doubtless in heaviest numbers, and instantly the gunners had their orders, and the cannon began to roar.

The shells flew over the cliffs, bursting in the timber beyond, and as soon as they had rained death into the midst of the red-skins and ponies alike, they were taken quickly to the rear, and poured in a hot fire upon the ridge, where there were hundreds of warriors coming down into the valley to attempt and drive the soldiers into the canyon.

The infantry began also to advance upon the ridge, firing as they did so, and the Indians were driven rapidly back up the ridge, just as the thunder of Major Roy's guns was heard, and shell after shell began to burst back over the cliffs.

"Hurrah! Roy is at them!" cried a young officer, as he dashed up to tell the colonel that the Indians were being driven from the ridge in the rear of the soldiers.

Then at both ends of the canyon the roar of the guns was incessant, the bursting of shells followed, the rattle of the infantry rifles was steady, and soon after the carbines of the cavalry was heard.

The Indians had attempted to stand their ground for awhile, but the fire of the "wheel guns," and their bursting shells demoralized them.

Their ponies were stampeded, and as the infantry of Major Roy began to climb the ridge, they broke and followed the example of their horses.

But they did not find escape so easy, for Buffalo Bill guided the cavalry up a narrow trail, the infantry with Colonel Kent following, and, driven into a narrow pass on the ridge, and caught between the fires of the main command and Major Roy's, they suffered greatly, and were soon in full flight, most of them on foot, as their stampeded ponies

had been rounded up by Texas Jack and a number of scouts, and started off toward the fort.

Within an hour the battle was won, and if a number of soldiers had been killed and wounded, the loss to the Indians had been ten to one, while nearly a thousand of their ponies had been captured.

Compelled to leave the guns in the canyon below, both Colonel Kent and Major Roy had ascended the ridge with their infantry and cavalry, and at last met on half-way ground upon the cliff, just where Buffalo Bill had seen the Giant Madman about to hurl the huge stone down upon the soldiers.

Buffalo Bill came up as the two officers grasped hands, for, mounted upon a cavalry-sergeant's horse, he had followed the flying Indians until sent back by the officer commanding the cavalry, to ask how far he should push the pursuit.

The two officers had only had a few words together, but enough had been said to let Major Roy know that Buffalo Bill had ridden the gantlet in safety, while Colonel Kent had heard that it was the scout who had brought the news to the fort that the expedition needed aid.

"I will send word back to Captain Bromfield, Cody, by Lieutenant Swayne, not to push the pursuit further, and you remain here with me and find us a good camping-place for the night as you have done fully enough for one day, for it is owing to what you have done that we have gained a grand victory.

"Come, major, call off your men and we will go into camp, for Cody will lead us to a good one," and the colonel gave the necessary orders for the pursuit to be checked.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILL MYSTIFIED.

COLONEL KENT, with the aid of his able officers, had the situation well in hand.

The artillery in the canyon was ordered to a camping-place, which Buffalo Bill sent one of his scouts to guide them to, and an officer had been dispatched to recall the cavalry from the pursuit, and with orders also to go into the general camp.

The infantry were devoting their attention to the dead and wounded, and the latter were being carried down the ridge to the ambulances, which had been ordered there to meet them, and then to push on for the fort.

When all was going well the major asked Buffalo Bill to show the colonel and himself just where he had found the Mad Giant, and the tree where he had bound him, the scout meanwhile making known to Colonel Kent his story of meeting the mysterious wild man and what had followed.

There on the cliff was the large stone the madman had so easily raised above his head.

Dismounting, the major, who was a very athletic man, in vain tried to raise the stone.

The scout did take it up in his arms, but was not able to raise it above his head, and taking up a smaller one he showed just how the wild man had easily handled the large rock.

Then the scout and the two officers rode to the spot where Cody had left his horse, and near there was the scene of the struggle which had been such a desperate one between Buffalo Bill and the man whom the Indians called the Evil Spirit.

"I believed by surprising him I might master him, for I did not wish to kill him, and I thought I could move more quickly than he could.

"I was never more mistaken in my life, Colonel Kent, and though I am known along the frontier as a very strong man, I was no match for him, and he could handle me as readily as I could a half-grown boy.

"Knowing my danger the fight was a desperate one, but I was bettered in the end, bound and led to yonder tree and—but what is that I see?" and the scout ceased his narrative of his desperate affray, touched his horse with his spurs and rode rapidly to the tree where he had found so many hours of suffering.

The two officers followed him, struck with his sudden words and his rapid departure from their side.

They saw Buffalo Bill standing before a

strange sight, one that seemed to impress him visibly.

What they saw also impressed them.

There, bound to a tree with lariat thongs, yet half torn from it, was a human form, or the remains of it.

It was the sight that the Mad Giant had beheld, and which caused him to believe the wolves had devoured Buffalo Bill.

There was the skeleton form, the flesh torn from the bones, which still clung together, save the hideous skull, which had fallen to the ground and been picked clean by the sharp teeth of the wolves.

The clothing was that of a white man, and had been torn in shreds by the ravenous beasts to get at the flesh.

The boots were also cut to pieces, and locks of matted, stained hair, the same length and hue of the scout's, was scattered about, while a large slouch hat was lying near.

It was a pitiable, appalling sight, and the two officers looked at Buffalo Bill as though expecting him to explain.

"I am as much mystified as you are, gentlemen."

"That is the tree to which I was bound, yes, and this is my lariat which I did not carry away with me."

"But who is this unfortunate man?"

Neither could answer the scout, and he made a most thorough search about the place.

"The hair is about the length and color of mine, and the clothes, boots and hat are those of a white man."

"What does it, what can it mean?"

It was very evident that Buffalo Bill was very much worried, and yet he went on with his search.

"See here," he suddenly cried, and he drew from the small finger of his left hand a ring.

Washing it off in the brook near, a heavy gold seal ring was revealed.

A design was engraved on the seal.

"It was a red stone, and in it was cut a hand grasping a knife, and in a semi-circle beneath were the words in French:

"Le jour viendra."

"The day will come!" said the colonel, translating the French, and he added sadly:

"The day has come, did come for him, poor fellow."

"But what do you make out of it, Cody?"

"I do not know, sir."

"But look! this tells a story."

The scout pointed to the skull, and in the very center of it was a small round hole.

"That is a bullet hole."

"Yes, colonel," and taking the skull up, hideous as it was, a bullet dropped upon the ground.

Buffalo Bill picked up the bullet, washed it off, and found it indented upon its side slightly.

He looked at it most intently, then took his knife and cut it, when he said:

"This is a silver bullet."

"Silver bullet?" echoed both officers.

"It most surely is, gentlemen."

"Well, I am completely mystified," and the scout evidently was.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCOUT'S MIDNIGHT MISSION.

THE more he regarded his strange discovery, the more mystified Buffalo Bill was.

In vain did he try to solve the affair.

All he could say was that he had been left by his enemy, the madman, tied to that very tree, with his own lariat.

In the night he had been released by an unknown, some one muffled from head to feet in a blanket.

The rescuer uttered no word, and whether white, black or red he could not tell.

As soon as he was able, he had started on his way to the fort.

That was all that he could tell, and yet now he came back to find that another unfortunate had been tied to that very tree, and with his lariat.

That other was a white man, too, with long dark hair, boots and clothing such as he wore.

The wolves had threatened to tear him, Buffalo Bill, to pieces.

They had torn the one who had followed him in pieces.

Was he not dead when they had done so?

The bullet wound in the forehead indicated that he was.

He could not have taken his own life bound as he was, and remembering his own sufferings, Buffalo Bill hoped that the other had been killed before the wolves seized him.

And more, the man had been killed by a silver bullet.

This was a strange circumstance there was no accounting for.

The ring and the bullet Buffalo Bill gave to Colonel Kent to keep until the mystery had been solved.

At last the scout said:

"It is my opinion, colonel, that the madman must have returned here, and with another captive, and finding me gone, in his demoniacal rage killed him and bound him to the tree."

"That is the only solution I can arrive at regarding the affair."

"And your unknown rescuer, Cody?"

"Ah! I had not thought of that, and your question suggests that the madman might have discovered his rescue of me, and so made him suffer."

"That is the way of it, I take it," said the colonel.

"But, who was this rescuer who met such a terrible fate?" the major asked.

"That I will make it my duty to find out, sir," returned Buffalo Bill, and he added:

"May I ask that we keep the finding of this body a secret, colonel, so that I can go my own way about finding out all about it?"

"Certainly, Cody, it will be best."

"Don't you think so, major?"

"Yes, sir, for the secret can come out when it is necessary to be known," answered the major.

"Then I will come here alone to-night, sir, gather up the remains, and bury them secretly."

"I will also take some pieces of the clothing, the boots and the hat, to keep with the ring and the bullet, as they may be needed to identify the body some time."

"Do so, and now let us go, and we must see to it that none of the scouts and soldiers come this way to discover the body."

The three then mounted and rode away, and the men were soon after drawn away from the ridge, and the bodies of the dead, soldiers and Indians alike, were buried in a little clump of pines not far from the trail.

The ambulances had started to the fort with the wounded, under a small guard, and the rest of the command went into camp as they arrived, the last squad of cavalry returning from the pursuit just as the sun set.

The encampment could not have been a better one under all circumstances, for there was water, grass and wood in plenty, and the position could be well defended in case of an attack, should the Indians, in their rage, return to strike a blow at night.

Buffalo Bill threw his scouts well out, to guard against surprise, and double sentinels were placed on duty.

It was time to turn in, when, tired as he was, Buffalo Bill mounted the horse he had been riding and rode away in the darkness.

"That man never tires," said an officer, who saw him depart, and then he addressed agreed with him in all that was said of the chief of scouts.

Buffalo Bill had concealed a pick and shovel in a blanket, and carried them with him, and once free from camp he took the trail on up to the spot where the torn body of the unfortunate unknown had been left.

He reached the spot, and unmindful of the darkness and gloom, he set to work to do his work of mercy in burying the remains.

He had a lantern with him, and its light enabled him to select some pieces of the clothing, the hat and boots, and fold them all up in a bundle.

Then he unfastened his lariat from the mangled form, washed it in the brook and hung it over the horn of his saddle.

Gathering up the bones then he bore them in a blanket to a secluded spot some distance up the stream, and with pick and shovel soon dug a grave and deposited them in it.

Returning then to the tree, near which he

had left his horse, he tied the pick and shovel to his saddle and turned to put out his lantern and mount, when he heard a wild cry of terror, it seemed, and ere he could draw a weapon he was struck a blow that felled him senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DYING SCOUT.

BUFFALO BILL had not very long left camp before a shot rung out, startling the sleeping soldiers, as well as those on duty.

The guard was at once turned out, and the whole camp was on the alert in a minute of time.

As the guard was hastening to the post from whence the shot had seemed to come, and yet from which no call had come from the sentry there, strange to say, a second shot was heard further along the line of sentinels.

There was still no call from the sentinel on the last post, and the flash and report had seemed further out than was the sentry line.

The "long roll" was at once sounded, to give a general alarm, and that it was needed the officer of the day quickly made known, as the guard had discovered two sentinels dead on the posts from whence the shots had been heard.

It was of course set down as the work of some skulking Indian, and the scouts were then sent out to make a detour of the camp.

Hardly had the scouts gotten a couple of hundred yards when a cry of alarm was heard from one, and then a shot followed quickly upon it.

Texas Jack ran like a deer toward the spot, and an officer and several soldiers followed him.

When Texas Jack reached the scene, he found one of the scouts lying upon the ground and groaning from a wound in his side.

"My poor Jeff—some red-skin has given you a bad wound, I fear," cried Jack, as he knelt by the side of his comrade, whom a minute before he had spoken to as he left the camp.

"It was no Injun, Jack," gasped the man.

"No Indian—who was it then, Jeff?"

"The devil."

"Poor pard, your mind is wandering," said Texas Jack, just as Major Roy and several soldiers came up.

"No, Jack, my mind's all right, though I've got to pass in my chips. I feel it and I tell you it was no Indian."

"Who was it then, my man?" asked the major in a kindly tone, kneeling by the side of the scout, while he ordered a soldier to bring the surgeon with all speed.

"No need of ther doctor now, thank yer, major, for I knows when I has gone my limit, and I'm going fast."

"And who was it that shot you, my man?"

"Ther same, man, demon or devil, that killed the two soldier sentinels."

"He was sneaking along to pick off another one when all of a sudden I ran upon him."

"I was scared and no mistake, for I saw what was a cross between a grizzly and ther devil."

"If it was a man, then he was the biggest one I ever seen, and he were clothed in skins."

"That was all I seen, and I tried to pull on him, but my narve wasn't equal to it, so I give a yell."

"He then saw me, and he gave a growl like a wild beast and sprung toward me."

"But he changed his mind, and shot me, and then he went off like a deer crying out as he ran."

"Three! three! three! ha! ha! ha!"

"I fell at the shot, and I've got my limit, major, so let me die right here."

"No, my man, I'll not believe you are mortally hit, and the surgeon will soon bring you round all right—here he comes now."

"I will leave him to your care, major, and see if I can make any discovery," said Texas Jack.

"Hold on, Pard Jack, don't run off that way, but shake as you will never feel my hand-clasp again."

All were touched by the simple words,

and the dying scout saw Jack run his hand across his eyes, while he could not speak as he turned and grasped his comrade by the hand.

"What, Jack, a tear, and for me?"

"Lord, old friend, I haven't had a tear shed for me since my poor old mother used to weep over me when I was a growin' kid."

"They say, them as don't know, that we men of the border are a bad lot, rough and with no hearts; but they don't know us, Jack."

"Now, pard, tell the chief good-by for me, for he's gone out of camp, and tell him I died doing my duty."

"Now, good-by, pard."

The hands of the two clasped for an instant, and unable to speak, Texas Jack turned quickly away and disappeared in the gloom of the timber near by.

The surgeon made no comment as he bent over the scout, but simply ordered him borne into the camp.

Tender hands raised him and he was soon placed near a camp fire, by the light of which the surgeon bent over to look at the wound.

A moment only did he look and then said:

"There is no need of my causing you greater pain, my poor fellow, by probing, for I will tell you frankly that the wound is fatal."

"I know'd it, didn't I, major?"

"Well, Buffalo Bill knows me, and where the few kin I have lives, and he will write them for me—ah! colonel, I want to say good-by to you, sir, and it was kind of you to come; but just like you, for you are a true man."

"And you, too, major, you'll say I was no slouch and did my duty."

And so the dying scout ran on until his voice became a whisper, then, with a sigh, he crossed the Great Divide.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MISSING CHIEF.

THE sentinel here was strengthened, and the scouts were constantly making a circuit of the camp until morning dawned, after the three men had been shot on duty.

The two soldiers and one scout killed, was a deadly record for the night, and a feeling of awe had come upon all when the rumor got out that poor Jeff had said that the one who had killed him was a huge creature, half man, half beast.

Of course, from the scout's description of the man, Colonel Kent and Major Roy both knew that it must be the Mad Giant described by Buffalo Bill.

It could be no other, they decided, and they talked together near their camp-fire until late in the night, and dreaded a meeting between Buffalo Bill and the madman.

Knowing the duty that Buffalo Bill had gone on, they were both fearful that he had met the madman, and they sent for Texas Jack, determined to take him into their confidence and have him go out with some of his men to see if his chief was really in danger.

But Texas Jack, the orderly reported, had gone out on a scout and had not yet returned.

So they retired to their blankets, but left orders that Texas Jack should come to them as soon as he arrived.

Day dawned and Texas Jack did not arrive; but, as Colonel Kent and the major sat down to an early breakfast he came in.

He had made an extended scout, he reported, but had seen nothing, and then, thinking that whoever had fired the shots would retreat along the trail the Indians had taken, he lay in wait there until daylight.

Seeing no one, and being dismounted, he had then returned to camp.

He was pained to hear of poor Jeff's death, and heard with considerable anxiety that the chief of scouts had not returned.

There was no way of accounting for Buffalo Bill's absence, save that some harm had befallen him.

Thus Colonel Kent told him the story of Buffalo Bill's having met the Mad Giant, and which Texas Jack had not before heard, and just why he had gone out of camp in the night.

"Now, Omohundro," continued Colonel Kent, "we do not wish this known for personal reasons."

"We are anxious to catch this mad man-slayer, and to learn who the unknown rescuer of Cody was, and also who it was that some one tied to that tree after he had killed him."

"We are going secretly to work, so do you keep the affair to yourself, and yet do all in your power to solve the mystery."

"Cody is missing, that is certain, and yet what he went to accomplish would not have taken him over three hours at the best, and he left camp about nine o'clock, so he has been ten hours away."

"He was to report to me at daybreak, and tell me what he had done."

"It looks bad, sir, but I hope he has met with no harm."

"So do all of us, most sincerely; but I wish you to take a score of your men, and send them about on the search, only do you make a thorough investigation of the surroundings of that tree, and keep your scouts away from them."

"You are second only to Cody in trailing and reading signs, and you can readily pick up information, with the knowledge you have to start on, and I can direct you to the spot."

"I will go at once, sir."

"As soon as you have had your breakfast, and we will camp here until to-morrow, while Major Roy will take a couple of hundred cavalry, and two light guns, and push along the Indian trail for some twenty miles, returning to camp to-night, by way of the pass."

"The guns firing in the mountains can be heard by the Indians, and they will believe we are marching toward their village, and will get a fright at least."

"Now, Omohundro, I depend upon you to find Cody, or discover what has become of him, while, should he turn up in camp, I shall send a courier in search of you to notify you of the fact."

"I will do my best, sir," said Texas Jack, and he at once went over to the scouts' camp and picked out a score of his best men to go with him.

It could be seen that the men were all anxious about their chief, and asked many questions, but all that Jack would reply was that they were going to find Buffalo Bill, who had gone off on a scout during the night and was overdue.

Having breakfast, and the men all being furnished with a day's provisions, Texas Jack mounted and led his little band out of camp.

Soldiers and all seemed to intuitively understand their mission, and several called out:

"Be sure to find Buffalo Bill, pards."

"We cannot afford to lose him."

Hardly had the scouts gone when Major Roy rode out of camp leading two hundred troopers and with a couple of six-pounders following.

CHAPTER XXII.

READING SIGNS.

TEXAS JACK was more than anxious about his chief, after having heard what the colonel had to say as to the Mad Giant.

Could Buffalo Bill have again fallen into the hands of that wild man, he wondered.

He had been very doubtful as to Buffalo Bill's having been worsted by one who was his superior in strength.

A phenomenally powerful man himself, Jack yet knew that his chief was his superior easily, and to understand just how one could be still so much stronger was beyond him.

And yet it had been Buffalo Bill's own story to Colonel Kent and Major Roy, so Texas Jack could not but believe it.

In leaving camp with his scouts he had to go it blind in a measure.

It would not be possible to follow a trail, with all the tracks about, and Jack was not acquainted with the hoof-tracks of the sergeant's horse, which the chief had ridden.

So he went to the canyon, halted there and sent his men in parties of three in different directions, telling them that he would go upon the cliffs alone, and meet them later at the place they started from.

So up the steep ridge he rode to the summit, and came out not far from where Buffalo Bill had been when he sighted that madman, about to hurl the stone upon the soldiers marching below him.

Texas Jack recognized the stone, from the colonel's description of it and the spot, and he saw as he rode up to it that it had been moved.

Dismounting he tried to discern how high he could raise it from the ground, and quickly relinquished the self-imposed task after a trial, with the remark:

"It is a couple of hundred more than I can tackle."

Then he saw the piles of stones all along the edge of the cliffs, which the Indians had gathered to hurl down upon the soldiers, and had been disappointed, having had a chance only to throw a few at Buffalo Bill as he sped through the canyon.

Then Texas Jack rode back in search of the tree to which his chief had been bound, and afterward an unknown.

He went down the slope to the stream, and there discovered what he was sure was the fatal tree.

A search about it convinced him that there was no mistake, for upon one side was the ground trodden down by the feet of Buffalo Bill, and about the trunk the marks of the lariat.

There were red stains, too, upon the tree and the ground, and the tracks of the hungry wolves, with here and there a still more ghostly tell-tale of the unfortunate who had there met his fate, for at night, by lantern light, Buffalo Bill had not been able to clear away all traces of the sickening scene.

That Buffalo Bill had been there was proven, so Texas Jack's next move was to try and trace him from that spot.

After a long while he found the scout's trail leading to the little grove where he had buried the remains of the unknown unfortunate.

He saw that the ground had been carefully dug and filled in, and his next move was to track the chief of scouts from there.

This he did by finding where he had hitched his horse, and noting the trails by which the animal had come to that spot, he began at once to follow it away from them.

To his surprise he saw that it did not lead back toward the camp,

Nor did it go in the direction of the fort.

Instead it bore away up the valley in the direction of the mountains where the Indians had their retreats.

Why had the chief of scouts gone in that direction instead of returning to the camp, Texas Jack wondered.

It could not have been far from daylight when Buffalo Bill had finished his task of burying the dead, and yet he had deliberately gone from, instead of toward, the camp, though he had to report to Colonel Kent at dawn.

"He may have seen some scouting red-skin and followed him."

"I will follow his trail," Texas Jack said.

Then he continued on along the trail, and after awhile muttered:

"He was riding slowly when he passed along here."

He discovered this by the tracks left by the horse ridden by the chief, and which showed that the animal was in a walk.

Texas Jack had now been long enough on the trail to feel that it must have been broad daylight when Buffalo Bill had gone along there.

He saw that the trail was leading up a valley that had its head in a mountain range some miles beyond.

Beyond this range was a wide valley, and at its head were the mountains where the Indians dwelt.

He was not on the trail the soldiers had taken to the red-skin village, for that was miles away to the left of him.

But he soon found that he had discovered the trail by which the Indians had flanked the pass and come to take up their position in ambush.

The many tracks of the ponies showed how large had been their force.

The track of the horse ridden by Buffalo Bill, iron-shod and a large animal, showed plainly among the lesser, unshod hoofs of the Indian ponies going toward the pass.

"Well, I have read signs enough to know that Buffalo Bill left this trail, and I wish to see the end of it," muttered Texas Jack, and once more he continued on, following the iron-shod tracks of the large cavalry horse Cody had ridden from the camp.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

TEXAS JACK knew full well that he was venturing upon dangerous ground, but he was not one to swerve from a duty, especially when he was seeking to find his chief and true friend Buffalo Bill, for the two were as brothers.

He therefore pushed on, until, heading the valley and ascending the ridge, he came to where the trail to the pass, to flank it and ambush the soldiers, was crossed by the Indian retreat from the pass.

But the retreating trail did not continue on with the one he was following; it was too far around to the Indian village that way, and the red-skins, demoralized by their retreat, were flying then to their mountain fastnesses.

The trail nearly crossed the one he had been traveling.

It did not take the scout's experienced eye long to discover that in their retreat the Indians had been weighted down by their dead and wounded.

The marks of many *travois* were seen upon which the wounded had been borne, and the dead had been piled, while there were more human footprints than pony tracks, as half of their horses had been stampeded and captured by the scouts, and there were scores of warriors who also had to walk back and give up their ponies to draw the *travois* and carry the slightly wounded.

"Well, they certainly got it bad, and as they lost half their ponies, and Colonel Kent entirely destroyed their village of hundreds of tepees, and forced the whole tribe further into the mountains, the result has been all that Government wished it to be, and I think a great deal of the success was owing to Buffalo Bill.

"But, what of him, poor fellow?

"Well, I'll still stick to the trail till I know where it ends."

So saying Texas Jack halted for his noon-day meal.

He found good grass for his horse, water was close at hand, and having staked the animal out he sat down and ate a cold dinner, for he dared not build a fire.

As he had ridden slowly all the morning, he did not halt longer than half an hour, and again saddling up and mounting he continued on his way.

After he had eaten his cold snack, he had gone about on foot, looking for the iron-shod hoofs of the horse ridden by his chief.

It did not take very long for him to find them, and he saw that they did not continue on in the trail.

Instead, they went on only a few hundred yards, and then branched off along the ridge to the left.

"This is strange.

"Buffalo Bill must have been following some special trail along here, though I do not see any.

"Still, a pony's unshod hoof would not leave the track that the large cavalry horse does with his iron shoes.

"Now to follow on," and then it was that Texas Jack returned to his horse to go on his way.

Along the ridge he went for over an hour, now and then unable to see any trace of a trail on the hard ground, and again picking it up once more further along.

At times he would come to a break in the heavy timber on the mountain top, and look away off over the broad valley to the higher range, where the Indians had their home.

Then the track would near the other side, and he could catch a view of the cliffs which had been the scene of the red-skins' ambush, and beyond which a few miles he knew was the encampment of the soldiers.

Looking still further beyond, he could see the range upon which Fort Vale was located, a long day's journey from where he then was.

He felt his utter loneliness, and yet, though liable to run upon a band of Indian

scouts at any moment, nothing would deter him from still trying to find out what the fate of Buffalo Bill had been.

So on he pressed once more, until the shadows of the trees began to lengthen as the sun neared the western horizon.

He knew that he could not then reach the rendezvous with his companion until late in the night, and that there would be alarm felt for his fate as well as the chief's, but on he went.

Suddenly he saw an opening ahead, a vista through the trees, and the trail he followed led straight to it.

The nature of the ground here made the iron-shod tracks more distinctly seen, and as Texas Jack rode into the opening he came out upon a cliff.

A roar reached his ears, and he knew that a torrent was dashing along far below in the valley.

He halted within fifty feet of the edge of the cliff, and dismounting went forward on foot.

It was a bold point of land, jutting out from the ridge, and going sheer off downward five hundred feet, where the foaming torrent dashed madly along.

But it was not the height that he looked down from that made the scout dizzy, but the fact that the trail of the iron-shod hoofs went directly over the cliff.

There was no doubt, no mistake, Texas Jack had found the end of Buffalo Bill's trail.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHOTS FROM AMBUSH.

TEXAS JACK stood like one who had been struck a stunning blow.

The discovery he had made dazed him.

He had followed the trail to the end and had found what?

The indication that his chief had ridden to his doom over the cliff.

Having recovered from the first shock, subdued the emotion that had almost overwhelmed him, Texas Jack set to work.

He had an hour yet of sunlight, and he would see what it would reveal to him.

Taking his horse to a spot where he could feed, Jack unsaddled and bridled him, so as to refresh him for the rapid ride he intended to make back to camp through the night.

He then went again to the cliff and began to thoroughly investigate the trail.

There were the iron tracks, made as the horse went along in a walk, and, without seeming to see his danger, had gone over the cliff.

The tracks showed where one fore foot had just caught the edge, broke the earth away, and the other hoof had tried to catch a hold to prevent a fall.

The hind feet had scraped and struggled for a second, in a mad scramble to prevent the fall, and they had broken the cliff edge as they also went over.

There was no doubt that the animal had walked over the cliff.

Looking coolly downward, Texas Jack beheld where the horse had fallen, six hundred feet below.

He could only have splashed downward into the swiftly flowing torrent, and been swept away beyond finding.

But was there a rider on the unfortunate animal?

Buffalo Bill was the rider, and if he had been in the saddle then he too had gone to his doom.

Texas Jack hoped in his inmost heart that the horse had had no rider when he went over.

But would the animal go without urging?

The tracks indicated that there had been no halt, no hesitation on the cliffs, until the fore feet had gone over, and then had come the desperate struggle.

Had Buffalo Bill, worn down by all he had passed through, been asleep in his saddle, and not have seen his danger?

That seemed the solution of it.

But the horse?

It appeared that the animal, tired and drowsy, had been moping along as horses often do, half asleep, and had not realized where he was going until too late to save himself from the fatal plunge.

Back along the trail Texas Jack walked,

to find that the horse had branched off toward the cliff seemingly aimlessly.

There was a faint trail along the ridge, made by deer and other wild animals, and along this the iron shod hoofs had led until they had turned off toward the cliff.

So, after a thorough search, and reading all of the signs with skillful eyes, Texas Jack came to the conclusion that the horse, half asleep, had branched off from the trail and gone over the cliff.

But there was a hope that the rider might have saved himself.

Then Jack went on along the ridge looking for any trace of a trail made by human foot.

There was none, and as the sun was now touching the horizon, he concluded to retrace his way.

Returning toward his horse he was startled by the sudden whir of arrows, and the crack of a rifle.

The arrows came truly aimed, one striking him on his belt buckle and being shattered, and a second sticking in the leather strap swung over one shoulder, and to which had hung his rifle, he having left the latter with his saddle.

The arrow had cut half through the leather strap, his hunting-coat and shirt, and wounded him slightly, being checked by striking a rib just over his heart.

But there was a rifle-shot as well.

Three hands had sent as many missiles at the scout, and they were all well aimed to kill.

The bullet from the rifle had cut directly through the scout's hat, just drawing blood from the scalp.

Texas Jack was a man of quick mind.

He could think with lightning rapidity and act as quickly.

He had realized in a flash that three persons had fired at him, and he naturally supposed they were red-skins.

So he must accomplish by strategy what he could not do then by the use of his weapons.

There was no hiding-place within twenty feet of him, and those who had fired the shots were doubtless watching the result.

So down dropped Texas Jack, and writhing for a moment he lay still.

But in that moment of seeming death-agony he had managed to draw his revolver and turn with his face toward his foes.

Thus he waited.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SCOUT'S STRATEGY.

HARDLY had Texas Jack fallen, when his ears were greeted with yells of triumph.

As he divided the chorus of yells, there were three voices.

That accounted for the trio of shots fired at him from ambush.

That they were Indian yells Jack knew, as well as he did that they were the war-cries of the Utes.

But he lay motionless, his revolver hidden by his arm, but the butt within reach of his hand.

His eyes were closed in part, but seeing all.

His form was as still as though in reality the life had left it, and the position was such as one suddenly shot down might assume.

But every sinew and muscle was nerved to its full tension for action the moment that action was needed.

The scout there lay and his half-closed eyes saw advancing toward him three forms.

He saw a chief in full war-paint and feathers, and two braves.

The chief carried a rifle, the braves were armed with bow and arrows.

Nearer they came, their forms boldly relieved against the setting sun.

They had killed their game they were sure.

They were going to reap the result.

For once Indian cunning had been over-matched, and a pale-face was the more artful.

Not a doubt crossed their minds but that their foe was dead.

How could it be otherwise, when they had fired from ambush, at a fair range, upon an unsuspecting foe.

But they had not counted upon a strange.

coincidence, that an arrow had struck a silver buckle, another a thick leather strap and a rib, and the bullet had cut its way just half an inch too high to be fatal.

But such had been the coincidence that had saved Texas Jack.

Instead of being dead the scout was shamming.

He "played possum" so well that the three Indians were within fifteen feet of him when they saw a twitch of the right hand and arm.

They had quickly halted to finish their work, but the twitch had been fatal to them, as the movement had grasped the butt of a revolver, and the next instant, without moving from his recumbent position the scout had touched the fatal trigger three times.

Each shot had followed the other so rapidly the three reports were mingled together as one.

And ere one of the red-skin trio could raise his weapon again he had felt the leaden messenger of death crashing through body or brain.

It was Texas Jack's time now to shout, and he leaped to his feet with a triumphant yell.

"I guess I must scalp them, or the boys might not think they are dead," he grimly muttered, as he bent over the three forms.

"Ah! they are rigged out in all their Indian regalia, a chief and two head braves.

"Going upon some special mission, I guess.

"Let me see that there are not more of them."

He quickly looked about him and discovered four Indian ponies hitched a short distance from where his own horse was staked out.

"Ah! their ponies are decked out, too, in gorgeous trappings.

"But, where is the man for the fourth pony?"

"Ah! I see!

"The stirrups are tied up, and that means he was being taken as a led horse, to carry some one back.

"And they were going along the ridge trail, when they came upon my horse, and simply laid for me.

"Well, I'll have to scalp them, take their fine trappings and arms, and light out for the camp.

"But, what about the bodies?"

"I have no means of burying them, and no time, so I guess I'll do as they did when I was a boy sailor, and used to follow the sea—I'll bury them at sea."

With this he stripped the bodies of their costumes and weapons, and then taking the form of the chief in his arms, walked to the cliff and launched it over.

Down it shot to strike the water with a thud and splash that the scout distinctly heard.

The other two bodies shared the same fate, and then, in the gathering twilight Texas Jack ate his supper, after which he fastened one Indian pony to the tail of the other, took the rein of the led one, and mounting his horse, started on the back trail for the camp.

There was a moon several days old, and this lighted his way for an hour, and then darkness came.

But he was too good a scout to care for that, and at the same brisk canter held on his way as before.

After several hours he halted for a short rest for the horses, and then resumed his way, his mind constantly pondering over the fate of Buffalo Bill.

It was after midnight when he rode down from the ridge into the canyon, where he had appointed the rendezvous with his scouts, and drew rein quickly at the sharp command:

"Halt! hands up!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN DOUBT.

"Ho, Dockery, on the alert, I see," was Texas Jack's answer to the stern challenge he had received as he neared the rendezvous of the scouts.

"Ah, Pard Jack, it is you, is it?"

"Yes, Dockery, and how goes every thing?"

"All right, sir; but I saw, as I thought, half a dozen horsemen, and so halted you, for I am on outpost duty here, and the boys are back a couple of hundred yards, but have no fires.

"Any news of Chief Cody, Pard Jack?"

"Well, yes, and I fear bad news.

"You had better remain where you are for to-night, and I will ride on to camp and see the colonel."

"Orders were to strike camp at dawn, but as you did not come back they were countermanded, and a large force was going in search of you at daybreak, for we feared you had come to harm as the chief had."

"No, I am all right, but I was hoping that Chief Cody might have returned to camp."

"No such good luck, Pard Jack.

"But these are Indian ponies."

"Yes, and their riders are accounted for, as I will tell you later, when I have a talk with the boys of what I discovered, for I am going to ask the colonel to let me take the scouts and go back on the trail."

"Now I will push on to the camp so as to get there before a move is made to look me up."

With this Texas Jack rode on toward the camp, flanking the sleeping scouts, who with perfect trust in their comrade guards were sleeping soundly, after their day of unsuccessful search for Buffalo Bill.

Texas Jack was again halted as he approached the main camp, this time by one of the Cowboy Rangers, who were doing duty as outpost sentinels.

But he made himself known and passed on to the soldier line of guards, where he was once more halted and, being recognized, was allowed to go into the lines, the officer of the day telling him he had better go at once to Colonel Kent's quarters and report, and adding:

"We were expecting to have to look you up, too, Jack; but I hope you bring news of Cody?"

"No good news, I am sorry to say, captain," and Jack rode on to the colonel's headquarters.

Colonel Kent and Major Roy had just risen from their blankets as Jack rode up, and they both recognized him in the early gray of dawn, the former calling out:

"Ah! Omohundro, I am more than glad to see you back, for the bugle was just about to call the cavalry into the saddles to go on a search for you—but, what news have you of Cody?"

"It is quite a long story, sir, so I will hitch my horse and tell you."

"Where did you get that tandem outfit?" and the colonel pointed to the Indian ponies tied one ahead of the other.

"Three of them had riders, sir, a chief and two braves, the fourth being a led horse. These will account for the three Indians, sir," and Texas Jack held up the scalps.

"Ah, you scalped them?"

"I don't like my men to follow the example of savages, Omohundro."

"True, sir, and I seldom raise an Indian's hair, but in this case thought it best.

"They fired on me from ambush, and an arrow and a bullet drew blood, though they were mere scratches, another arrow striking my belt here, as you see.

"I scalped them and saved their trappings and their ponies, sir, as proof that they are dead, for you know the boys have told some great stories of late of what they had done, and the cry is now 'show up or shut up.'"

"Well, Texas Jack, no one would doubt you," said the colonel with a smile.

"Like Cody, your deeds have spoken for you, and I congratulate you upon your escape, and compliment you upon your gallant achievement.

"Major Roy went a long way toward the Indian village with his cavalry, and his scouts saw two trails, one of a horse they said must have been Cody's, and another they could not account for."

"It was my horse made the second trail, sir, for I followed Chief Cody from the start," and having turned his own and his captured ponies over to an orderly whom the colonel called to take them, Texas Jack gladly accepted the invitation to breakfast with the headquarters men, after which he told the colonel and Major Roy the whole story of the discovery he had made.

"I half-way believed, sir, I would find

Chief Cody in camp, he having escaped going over the cliff with his horse, and it hurt me when I found he was not here," he said.

"Then you fear he went over the cliff?"

"Yes, sir, for it looks that way."

"I fear it does; but what carried Cody to that part of the country, when he was to return to camp after burying the body of the unknown man?"

"I could find no reason for his going, sir, and I would like to ask you, as you are returning to the fort, if I could take the scouts, and about as many Cowboy Rangers, and go again on the trail?"

"Yes, and Major Roy will go also with a couple of troops of cavalry and two guns without caissons, and make the search most thorough, which the force along will enable you to do.

"I will turn over the provisions to you, major, and pull out for the fort with the rest of the command."

An hour after the command was on its way to the fort, while Major Roy with two troops of cavalry, and half a hundred scouts and cowboys under Texas Jack, were off on Buffalo Bill's mysterious trail that ended at the cliff.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COLONEL RECEIVES A LETTER.

THE mysterious disappearance of Buffalo Bill caused Colonel Kent considerable uneasiness.

The chief of scouts had disappeared before, when on the march to the Indian village, and all had believed him slain.

Well for all was it that he had disappeared, as the command, without the aid of Major Roy's force, would have been caught in a very deadly trap.

Time and again Buffalo Bill had been reported lost, missing and dead; but he had always turned up at the right time and with credit to himself.

But now there was a mystery about his going off on that lone trail toward the Indian country which Colonel Kent and no one else could fathom.

Then, too, from the report of Texas Jack it seemed that the chief of scouts had at last come to the end of his trail.

So the colonel rode rapidly on to the fort, accompanied by a small guard, and leaving the command to follow more leisurely, and all along he was pondering over the fate of Buffalo Bill and wondering if Major Roy's special search force would find him.

The coming of the colonel was reported by the sentinel, and at once Lieutenant-Colonel Grayson made all arrangements to welcome him.

Other flags were run up, the band was called out, the troops at the fort were called to arms, and the officers' wives, children and other non-combatants at the fort assembled to aid in the welcome.

The large drove of captured Indian ponies had arrived at the corrals, the wounded had come in, and the story of the expedition to the Indian village, which had been destroyed, and the reserve party's services, had been unofficially told, so that all rejoiced at what really had been a grand victory for the troops.

The guns thundered forth a salute as the colonel and his party dashed up, and cheers rent the air, while Colonel Grayson warmly greeted his superior, and the two went to headquarters together.

It was soon told, the whole story of the expedition, and though sorrow for the slain was felt, they were known to have met a soldier's fate, and the rejoicing over the victory was universal.

Many felt deepest regret at the unknown fate of Buffalo Bill, and it could be seen that few believed but that he would turn up all right in the end, while Lieutenant-Colonel Grayson said:

"Cody's luck is proverbial, and it will not desert him this time.

"But here, Colonel Kent, is your mail, for two riders have arrived since you left, and I will leave you to look over your letters."

"No, no, Grayson, remain, for these may be of importance to talk with you about, and I wish to thank you for your promptness in sending Major Roy to my relief."

"That was Cody's work, colonel, for he

asked me to let Major Roy get his command together while he was telling me the need of them.

"He certainly met with a most remarkable adventure with that madman."

"Yes, he did indeed."

"Poor Cody, I hope he is not dead; but we will know when Major Roy returns to the fort."

"I will particularly mention his valuable services on the expedition in my report to the Department Headquarters, and I hope that the authorities at Washington will be satisfied now that I have destroyed the Indian village, and which well-nigh ended in the annihilation of the entire command; in fact, we owe it to Cody that Major Roy was on hand to attack the red-skins when they believed they had us at their mercy."

All this time Colonel Kent was opening his letters, glancing at them and casting them aside.

Now he had opened one that caused him to stop talking and glanced over it slowly.

At last he said:

"Grayson, listen to this letter I have received."

"It is from an old friend of mine from whom I have not heard for a great many years, and really thought was dead."

"We were boys together, and were also in the same class at West Point, and when he graduated he came West in the cavalry, got in some trouble, for I know he was under a cloud, and resigned under pressure it was said."

"Then, it was said, he went to the mining-camps and became a noted gambler, and was in several killing scrapes, and that was the last I heard of him, until now I receive this letter from him."

"It is dated from Omaha, and—but I'll read it to you," and Colonel Kent read as follows:

"MY DEAR KENT:—

"Have you wholly forgotten your old friend Duke Dashwood?—if so, permit me to remind you of him by this letter."

"I learn you are commanding Fort Vale, and as I have business calling me to Utah, I am coming to see you, for the sake of our boyhood days."

"I am well fixed, and expect to get quite a sum by coming West, for I know just where to lay my hands upon it."

"I am an old frontier man so know my way and shall come alone, so expect to see me soon after receiving this letter."

"Ever yours,

"DUKE DASHWOOD."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TELL-TALE RING.

WHEN the colonel ceased reading the letter he seemed to be waiting for his brother officer to speak.

Colonel Grayson had listened with considerable interest to the letter of the colonel's strange friend and said:

"Yes, I remember having heard of Dashwood."

"He graduated the year before I left West Point, but many stories were told of him, such as his being the handsomest cadet at the post, as generous as a prince, wild, and a reckless fellow generally."

"I remember too that the cloud upon him was the charge of sharp practice at cards, at least he was accused of cheating by his lieutenant, who, strange to say, was afterward dismissed the service for dishonorable conduct and many thought that Dashwood was falsely accused and not guilty."

"Anyhow he had left the service then, and I never knew what had become of him, but I shall be glad of his coming here as I should like to meet him."

"As I will be glad also to meet him, for I never believed him to be guilty as accused, and those who met him after his resignation said the charge broke down his proud spirit and made a reckless outcast of him."

"I am glad that he has prospered, and he will be welcome, though he is very foolish to attempt to come through this country alone."

"Yes, but those I heard speak of him were wont to say he was a splendid, dashing soldier, a bold Indian-fighter and a thorough scout, and would go anywhere alone."

"Yes, he was all that, and is a perfect frontiersman, but nevertheless he should not come alone through this country."

"I agree with you."

"By the way he was very much such a looking man as Buffalo Bill, and when he took to gambling in the mines he wore his hair long, I have heard, and must have looked strikingly like the scout; but now let me tell you what I forgot to do, that last night after Cody rode away from the camp, to go and bury that unfortunate fellow whose mangled remains were found bound to a tree, there were three men on outpost duty mysteriously shot, two soldiers and a scout, and from the description given of the man who shot them, for the scout was able to tell about him, I believe it was Cody's Mad Giant."

"Then that may account for Cody's absence, as he may have met him again."

"Yes, Grayson, but then Texas Jack tracked the horse ridden by Cody to the cliff, where he went over."

"True."

"It is all an unfathomable mystery to me."

"But you spoke of finding a ring on the finger of the man you found bound to a tree."

"Yes, I will show it to you, and also the bullet with which he was shot."

"The latter you see is of silver, not lead."

Colonel Grayson took the bullet first and looked at it curiously, and said:

"Yes, it is certainly silver—a queer conceit certainly, and the one who molded it must have had a silver mine to draw on."

"I cannot understand it; but look at the ring."

"It is a massive affair, and you have seen the device on the red stone?"

"Yes, a hand grasping a dagger, and the French words meaning, 'The day will come.'"

"Yes, and there is some engraving in the ring."

"Ah! I had not noticed that."

"What is it?" asked the colonel with interest.

"A name," and holding the ring so that the light fell full upon the engraving, Lieutenant-Colonel Grayson cried excitedly:

"Great God! it is the name of your friend, colonel—Duke Dashwood!"

Colonel Kent sprung to his feet with a surprised exclamation and held out his hand for the ring.

It was handed to him by the lieutenant-colonel and Colonel Kent read aloud:

"Duke Dashwood."

"It is true, and neither Buffalo Bill, Major Roy or myself noticed it when we looked at it."

"Can it be that poor Dashwood was the victim who was shot by the silver bullet and bound to that tree?"

"The ring would indicate that it was he, taken in connection with your letter from him, saying he would come alone, and to expect him about this time."

"Yes, but who was his murderer and why was he murdered?"

"You saw the remains?"

"Yes, torn to pieces by the wolves."

"Could you find nothing to trace him?"

"This ring, yes, and his hair was long and dark, while Cody said he was a tall man, about his height."

"He wore good clothes, though of the border style, top-boots and a slouch hat."

"Cody was to gather up parts of his attire, his boots and hat, and bring them back with him, but alas! he has not returned."

"I very much fear that the murdered man was your friend Dashwood, as all signs point that way, though why he should be dealt with as he was, I can not understand."

"Nor I."

"Oh! that they may find Cody, for he is the man of all men to unravel a mystery, and is a born detective."

"I do hope that Roy may bring home some news of him, though I hardly dare hope that harm has not befallen him too."

Thus the two officers talked together for a long time, but without arriving at any solution of the mysterious absence of Buffalo Bill, or the tell-tale ring with its prophetic motto.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RETURN OF THE SEARCHERS.

AMONG the scouts in Buffalo Bill's band of Rangers, there was one who was known as "Old Buckskin Joe."

Few people knew that he had any other name, and that it was very like his nickname, for he had been christened three-score years before as Joseph, and his full cognomen was Joseph Buck, changed to Old Buckskin Joe.

This old scout was a man with a history, for he had come West to make a fortune while in his teens, and had dug a nice little sum out of the California mines, and then had returned East to marry the girl he so dearly loved.

She had broken her pledge to him and married another, Joe's best friend in boyhood, and whose life had been saved by the very young man whose sweetheart he stole from him.

Joseph Buck was broken down at the discovery and grew revengeful, and one night he met the man who had wronged him, and it was a fatal meeting.

He fell dead by Joe Buck's hand, and it was said to be a case of self-defense, yet the young miner was sent to prison for three years.

He served his time, came out and began to drink and squander his money; in fact, he went through his fortune, and then started west once more.

On his way he was taken ill, and a kind farmer nursed him back to health and strength, and Joe worked for him six months to repay him.

But the farmer had a lovely daughter, who had been Joe's devoted nurse, and so he loved her and went again to seek a fortune for her sake.

After many wanderings in the far West he again "struck it rich," and returning for the farmer's daughter, they were married, and removed to a home which Joe had built way out on the prairies.

A couple of years of happiness came to Joe, and then one night the Indians raided his home; his wife and baby were scalped before his eyes; he, too, was severely wounded, and his house burned and all his cattle run off.

But for the gallant dash of a single horseman Joe would have been dragged, wounded as he was, a prisoner to the Indian village.

But he was rescued and most kindly cared for by his rescuer, and from that day Joe Buck took to scouting and soon became known as a splendid scout and guide, and a deadly foe to the red-skins.

His hair turned white before his time, and he became a silent, imbibited man, but desperate in battle, and as true as steel to his friends.

Again captured by Indians, he would have been burned at the stake, but for Buffalo Bill and his men pursuing the red-skins, and saving him from a fate so terrible.

From that day he joined Cody's scout band, and was the devoted friend of the chief and every man in it.

When after several days Major Roy returned to the fort, and as all saw with deep regret, without Buffalo Bill, and the three ranking officers at the fort were talking matters over, the major, who had heard what the colonel had to say about Duke Dashwood, said:

"I have heard of Dashwood, and there is a man in Cody's command who knew him well, and can tell all about him."

"Who is he, major?"

"His name I do not know, though he is known as Old Buckskin, and I once heard that he was in the mines with Duke Dashwood, and the two were friends."

"We were discussing Dashwood one night, when I was at Fort McPherson, and Old Buckskin was a scout there, and I was told that he was a man with a strange history, and was the friend of Dashwood, having once killed a man for slandering Dashwood."

"I will send for him and see if we can get any information to help us, for the more I think of it, I feel assured that it was Dashwood who was bound to that tree; but now let me hear your story of your search for Buffalo Bill?"

"It is soon told, colonel."

"We went along the trail from the fatal tree, Texas Jack and I, sending the men on to a point ahead to meet us."

"We picked up the trail of Cody's horse, found the grave where he had buried the bones of the unknown man we discovered bound to the tree, and followed on in the tracks until we joined the men some miles on."

"Then we pushed along until late in the afternoon we reached the cliff, and from what I saw there I was convinced that Cody went over to his death."

"The horse, you mean?"

"Yes, sir; and I was assuming that Cody was on his back."

"It is my hope that he was not, major."

"And mine, and all of us had that one hope for Cody's life."

"But there were the tracks where the horse had gone over, and it is a fall of five hundred feet, and a torrent is at the bottom of the cliff."

"I camped there, and Texas Jack showed me where the Indians had been when they fired upon him, and he searched about until dark."

"At dawn we extended our search, and there was no way for a horse to leave that ridge save by the way he had gone up, or over the cliff."

"As we could discover nothing more, and there seemed to be no Indians about, I decided to return to the fort."

"You were right, major."

"And Texas Jack and his scouts returned with you?"

"Yes, sir, though Texas Jack and Old Buckskin wished to remain, but I refused to let them as I saw no use in further search."

"I fear it is so; but now I will send for the old scout, Old Buckskin Joe," and an orderly was dispatched to order him to headquarters.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD BUCKSKIN JOE.

THE orderly returned from the scouts' camp and ushered "Old Buckskin" into the presence of the colonel and his two brother officers.

Of course they all knew him, but now regarded him more attentively than ever before.

Since he had been at the fort they had known him as a man ever ready for the war-path, and always anxious to do his duty, while his skill as a scout was acknowledged by all.

Regarding him now as he entered and saluted politely, they saw a man six feet in height and perfectly erect, though his long hair and beard were snow-white.

His shoulders were broad, his waist slender, and arms and legs very muscular.

He was dressed in buckskin from head to feet.

His moccasins were of buckskin, for he never wore boots, his leggings and hunting-shirt, and the cap he wore as well, and even his belt, were of the same material.

All were well made and fitted him well, and there was an air about him that showed he was careful about his toilet, his long hair and beard being well cared for.

There was also that about the man that stamped him as one who had not forgotten his refined surroundings, in youth, notwithstanding his wild border life, for his manners were really courtly, and his voice low and rich toned.

He did not assume the slang of the border, nor speak in the frontier slang which a man so quickly drops into.

Then, too, Old Buckskin had never been known to utter an oath, nor did he drink or use tobacco.

The year of dissipation he had known, and which grief had driven him to, when he squandered his hard-earned savings in the mines, had been his last dissipation, for he had been redeemed from himself by the farmer's daughter, whom he had afterward made his wife, to see her years after, slain before his eyes, their little child torn from her arms and carried away to share the same fate.

The face of Old Buckskin was a study.

It was a noble face, such a one as you would expect some great man to possess.

At first glance he appeared an old man,

His white locks and beard were the cause of this, for a closer look showed no wrinkles in his face, but a clear, bronzed complexion, indicating health and vigor, for Old Buckskin was just a few years over the threshold of two-score.

His eyes were very large, black, and had a dreamy look, as though they were looking back into a sorrowful past.

Their expression, at rest, was extremely sad, and it seemed that tears were ever ready to flow.

But in action they were lighted up brilliantly, and were full of flashes of light, which the long lashes failed to conceal.

The nose was straight and expressive, and the mouth was full of determination and daring.

Generally it was a cynical look, but now and then softened in repose, and was in keeping with his eyes, they adding to the intensely sad look in his face when he was lost in meditation, and his comrades who knew him best were wont to say that whatever his past had been, it was constantly before him.

His never speaking unless there was need for it, had given him the name of Silent Joe as well, though he was never morose.

With a splendid voice, it was only now and then, when following an Indian trail, that he could ever be persuaded to sing, accompanying himself upon the guitar.

But when after the red-skins he brightened up and was often seen to smile, in fact, he seemed more cheerful in deadliest danger, and before a battle more than at any other time.

His comrades said that it was because he was about to strike another blow to avenge his wife and baby, and that he was merciless in action, but as tender as a woman toward an Indian who was wounded and at his mercy.

Such was the strange character whom Colonel Kent had sent for to ask about his friend, Duke Dashwood, a man scarcely less strange than Old Buckskin the scout, it was said, and one who had a history as well.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FALSE CHARGE.

WITH a respect for the scout, which his presence commanded, Colonel Kent said pleasantly:

"Sit down, scout, and just tell me how you are down on the rolls?"

"Under my own name, sir, which I have no desire to screen."

"It is Joseph Buck," was the answer, delivered politely, with a military salute, and with dignity.

But the scout did not take the seat, and the colonel again said:

"Be seated, Mr. Buck, for I wish to have some talk with you."

Thus urged the scout took the seat and the colonel continued:

"You are acting as second in command of the scouts, while, in the absence of Chief Cody, Texas Jack is commanding?"

"I have that honor, sir."

"You have lived for a long time on this frontier, I believe?"

"In California, New Mexico and Utah, sir, I have."

"Do you recall a former officer of the army by the name of Lieutenant Duke Dashwood?"

"I do, God bless him, sir."

"You were friends then?"

"I owe him my life, sir, and we were the best of friends."

"I received a letter some days ago from him, for he was a boyhood friend of mine, telling me he was coming to this fort."

"I certainly am glad to hear that, sir, for I have not heard of him for years."

"Do you remember at one time he fell under a cloud, and resigned from the army?"

"I do, Colonel Kent, but you are not the man to hold that against him?"

The words came out frankly and earnestly.

"No, I never did, for I always believed implicitly in Dashwood, and felt that he was the victim of unfortunate circumstances."

"He was, sir, and more, he was the victim of a plot, laid for him by another."

"I would like to have you tell us what you know of the affair, for we have only heard it from rumor."

"I will gladly tell you anything I can to clear Mr. Dashwood of the cloud of suspicion upon him, sir."

"It was down in Arizona, Colonel Kent, when he was stationed there at an advance post, and it all came about from a game of cards."

"Lieutenant Dashwood was a man of luck, and he won so regularly that a brother officer, the junior lieutenant of his troop, for Mr. Dashwood was commanding, the captain being laid up by a severe wound, charged him with cheating."

"The accusation was wholly unfounded, but there were those who believed it, especially on account of Lieutenant Dashwood's strange conduct in the face of such a charge."

"What was that?"

"He did not resent the insult, left it for his friends to decide if he was guilty, and, after several months, resigned his commission."

"You remember the officer who made the charge?"

"Yes, sir, it was Lieutenant Norcross Nevins."

"He afterward resigned?"

"No, sir, he was afterwards dismissed, as he was caught cheating, was overwhelmed with debt, and left a very black record behind him."

"Then it was that those who had suspected Lieutenant Dashwood of fraud, changed their minds, for the truth he had never told of the affair and few, if any, knew it."

"Do you know the reason?"

"I do, sir."

"And will tell us."

"With pleasure, sir, as it will clear the lieutenant of all thought of dishonor."

"Let us hear it then."

"Mr. Dashwood was engaged to Miss Clara Nevins, the sister of his former lieutenant, and she was devoted to her brother."

"Mr. Nevins was an inveterate gambler, and having introduced Mr. Dashwood to his sister, he was wont to call upon him for money to help him out of scrapes."

"This Mr. Dashwood did time and again, for he had a fair income outside of his pay, and at the time of the accusation against his superior, Nevins owed him some five thousand dollars."

"Mr. Nevins had also been aware of the fact that his sister had a lover of middle age, a man of great wealth, who was urging her to break with Mr. Dashwood and marry him, promising to settle a large sum upon her in her own name on the wedding day."

"This caused Mr. Nevins to decide to break the engagement between Lieutenant Dashwood and his sister, and hence the charge against him, and also the reason is plain why the insult was not resented."

"The lieutenant idolized Miss Nevins, knew of her devotion to her brother, and would not hold him responsible, while he wrote her, hoping she would not heed the charge."

"Did she?"

"Yes, sir."

"As soon as he had her letter, severing the engagement, he resigned from the army."

"Then he challenged Mr. Nevins to meet him in a duel, and he refused, upon the plea that he could only meet an honorable man."

"Soon after Miss Nevins married her rich lover, to find that he was a bankrupt, and so she could not help her brother and he took to cheating at cards to hide his losses."

"And Lieutenant Dashwood?"

"Went to a mining-camp and mined for a while, then turned gambler and was made captain of the Vigilantes by the mining settlement, and it was while he was in that capacity that he risked his life to save me one day, and we became as brothers."

"I am glad that you have told me this, Scout Buck, for it verifies my opinion of my old friend."

"Now tell me what else you know of him, please?"

"A great deal, sir," was the earnest response.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SILVER BULLET DICK.

OLD BUCKSKIN sat for a moment in deep meditation, and that inexpressible sad look came over his handsome face, which showed

that his thoughts had gone dreaming into the past, a past that had been so bitter to him.

The three officers looked at him as upon one who held their deepest sympathy, while, seeing that he had lost himself in thought, the colonel said, gently:

"You say you knew Dashwood in his life among the mines?"

The scout started, passed his hand across his brow, as though to brush away the clouds, and said quickly:

"I beg pardon, colonel, but I fear I was down in the depths, as the boys call my moods."

"You wished me to tell you more of Mr. Dashwood?"

"Yes, Mr. Buck."

"Ah, colonel, please don't mister me, for I'm plain Joe Buck, or Old Buckskin, just as you please."

"I told you that Mr. Dashwood saved my life, and after that we became as brothers."

"He seemed imbibed with life, and so was I, and that was a bond between us."

"He took to gambling, and was called the only square-card man on the border, and square he was, though his luck stuck to him, and some losers growled about his steady winnings."

"He would not knowingly play with a poor man, or one whose family was depending on what he sent them from his earnings in the mines."

"But those who struck it rich, who felt they were lord sharps, and men with money to lose he would take a hand with."

"Whether winning or losing, he was always as cool as an icicle, and appeared to play for the sport rather than the money."

"When he won heavily, he used to go around the camp and give money to the sick and unfortunate."

"Well, gentlemen, though he had many friends, there were those who wished to down him, and I overheard a talk one night to accuse him of cheating, raise a row, and kill him."

"I had no time to warn him, but I went to the saloon, and when the charge was made I called the fellow a liar."

"Of course you know what that means out here, and I killed him,—in fact, there were five men died with their boots on then and there, and when I told the crowd of the plot I had heard, three of the plotters—there were five of them—were taken out of the saloon and hanged to a tree."

"Captain Dashwood, as we called him, was wounded, but not seriously, and I went home with him to his cabin."

"He had a strange fancy of using silver bullets in his revolvers and rifles, molding them himself from silver ore he had dug while mining, and—"

"Silver bullets?" cried the colonel, with a quick glance at the lieutenant-colonel and major.

"Yes, sir, it was a conceit of his, and the men called him Silver Bullet Dick, changing his name of Duke to Dick."

"And he was known generally to use silver bullets?"

"Yes, sir, and while he was in the mines he killed half a dozen men with them—remember, sir, he was no desperado, and he never sought trouble, but men would crowd him at times, and he acted only in self defense."

"When did he go from the mines?"

He left the mines suddenly, and though none of the miners knew the reason, I suspected it from what I knew of his life."

"What was the reason?"

"I was away at the time, guiding a train westward, and he left a note for me saying he was going, as a cruel fate seemed to dog him, to try and find a place where he would not be reminded of the past."

"He said that, some day we might meet again."

"And that was all he said in his letter to you?"

"Yes, sir, for I have the letter still."

"When I returned to the mines I found that a strange couple had arrived there and set up business. It was a man and his sister, and they were gamblers."

"The woman was beautiful, but wicked-looking, and she was called the Ruby Queen, as she wore no other jewels than rubies, and those in plenty."

"She had a necklace of rubies, bracelets, rings, earrings, and a breastpin in the shape of a dagger, and they were worth a fortune."

"She handled cards like a sharp, and set up a game which the miners were only too anxious to bite at."

"The woman dressed in black, wore a black slouch hat with a large ostrich feather of scarlet, pinned in with a dagger pin of rubies, while she carried a pair of revolvers in the belt about her waist."

"Well, gentlemen, that woman raised the very devil in the mines, and made a mint of money; but I recognized her brother as soon as I had time to figure him out, and her face came back to me from a photograph Silver Bullet Dick had shown me, for they were Norcross Nevins and his sister."

"Can it be possible?"

"It was none other, Colonel Kent, and their coming was the cause of Silver Bullet Dick leaving the mines, for he had seen and recognized them while they had missed him, but that they went there to find him I am sure."

"They left as suddenly as they came, and after going the rounds of the mining-camps, disappeared."

"And Dashwood?"

"I heard that he had been captured by Indians, sir, and married the daughter of the chief, who saved his life, and since then I know nothing about him, but am more than glad to know that he is coming here to visit you, sir, for that means that he is safe and well."

"I am not so sure of that, scout," observed the colonel, significantly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TWO SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE.

THE tone in which Colonel Kent spoke at once was noticed by Old Buckskin, and he asked quickly:

"Have you any news, sir, that Mr. Dashwood is not safe and well?"

"I'll tell you, scout, and have your opinion."

"Yes, sir."

"First, tell me if you remember that Dashwood wore any jewelry?"

"He was not of the flash kind, sir, but did have a watch and chain, and a ring."

"Do you remember the ring?"

"Yes, sir; it was a family crest, he said, cut into a seal."

"Describe the ring, please."

"It was of heavy gold, representing shields piled together, and around the top were links of a chain in a circle, and in which the stone was set."

"Do you remember the stone?"

"Yes, sir; it was a blood-stone, and Mr. Dashwood said to me one day that the crest and motto of his family were ominous."

"You recall the crest, doubtless?"

"Yes, sir: a hand grasping a dagger, and the motto was in French—*Le jour viendra*."

"Is this the ring?" and the colonel handed over the ring taken from the finger of the man whom Buffalo Bill had found bound to the tree where he had been left as a prisoner by the Mad Giant."

"Oh, yes; this is the ring, colonel, and his name should be in it—yes, here it is," and the scout's face assumed an anxious look now, and he asked:

"May I inquire where you got the ring, sir?"

"Yes, I will tell you."

"But, let me say that the whole affair is enveloped in mystery just now, and we are keeping it a secret until we can make some discoveries."

"First, here is the letter from Dashwood. It was written nearly a month ago, and dated at Omaha."

"Read it."

The scout quickly did so, and said:

"It is his writing, sir, and it is time that he had arrived at the fort."

"Yes, but he says he was to come alone."

"He was well capable of doing so, Colonel Kent, as there are few more skillful border-men than he."

"We will need your aid, Buck, and so I am going to tell you the whole affair and learn just what your opinion is."

"Thank you, sir."

"You are aware of the unsuccessful search

for Buffalo Bill, but I desire you to know what we regard as the cause of his disappearance, and with which Dashwood is connected, as you will learn."

Then the colonel told the whole story known only to the three officers present, Texas Jack, and the absent chief of scouts.

With silence, but with deepest interest the scout listened to all, his face showing no sign of what was in his thoughts.

When he had heard all there was to tell, he brightened up at once and asked quickly:

"The letter was sent from Omaha, sir?"

"Yes."

"He was to come alone, and there are but two trails he could take."

"Well?"

"That would cause him to pass one of two points, or stage-stations, and certainly he would be known to have gone by or not."

"That is true."

"Buffalo Bill disappeared the night he went to burn the mangled body, sir?"

"Yes."

"But he buried the body, and then was tracked, as I know, to the cliff?"

"He was."

"Now, Colonel Kent, we must find out if Mr. Dashwood did, or did not pass either of those points, according to the trail he took in coming here."

"Yes, that will show which way he came and where he was last seen."

"Now Texas Jack can go to both points, first one, then down to the other, for they are but sixty miles apart, and then he can join me, and we can work in full possession of facts, and with our eyes open."

"Join you where, scout?"

"Off on the trail, sir, for, with your permission, I should like to go at once."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir. I can do better alone until Jack comes. We work well together, and it will not do to take many."

"We can go well prepared for a long stay, and while Jack is finding out about the trail Mr. Dashwood took, I can go over the field slowly where the body was found, and thence on to the cliff which Chief Cody is supposed to have ridden over."

"Somehow I cannot believe that either Mr. Dashwood or Buffalo Bill are dead."

"It does not seem to me that those two men were born to die that way, and the unknown, muffled form that rescued Buffalo Bill must be discovered, for it was no Indian I am sure. Then, too, the one who fired that silver bullet and tied his victim to a tree to be devoured by wolves, must also be discovered. He, likewise, was no Indian."

"Then the Mad Giant must be hunted down, and positive proof obtained that both Mr. Dashwood and Buffalo Bill have been killed, for, as I said, sir, I do not believe it."

"If they are they must be avenged," and the scout sprung to his feet, his eyes flashing. The colonel and the other two officers then saw just what the man could be when aroused to action in battle.

Colonel Kent at once sent for Texas Jack, and the affair was talked over, a rendezvous appointed where the two scouts were to meet, and an hour after they were riding away from the fort on their separate missions, to come together again in a few days on the trail of rescue or revenge.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TEXAS JACK'S MISSION.

THE trail taken by Texas Jack upon leaving the fort, was the one the army wagon trains used in going to and fro, and it wound along among the valleys to the nearest point where it struck the Overland stage route across the continent.

This was a day's ride from the fort.

The other trail was one that led to another point on the Overland, not so far away, and hitting the line further west.

It led through mountain pastures, along valleys and over plains, across streams used where vehicles could not travel, being and only by the Pony Mail Riders to and from the fort, and the couriers bearing dispatches, and perhaps a squadron of cavalry on a scout.

The two stations were something over sixty miles apart, and at each was a frontier settlement.

One settlement was mostly agricultural and of a stock-raising class, and the other, in the mountains, was a mining-camp.

Persons going to the fort on horseback were won't to continue on to the station and take that trail, while others would go by a buck-board hired at the more easterly point.

At the further one there was a branch stage line, running to a settlement and army post further north, and it might be that any one going to Fort Vale would go by one, or both places, and so it was that Texas Jack was to first visit the more easterly point, then the westerly one, and from the latter make his way by his own judgment to his rendezvous with Old Buckskin at the cliff where it was believed by 'most every one at Fort Vale that Buffalo Bill had lost his life.

Mounted upon a splendid horse and fully armed to meet all emergencies, Texas Jack started out for the first station on the Overland, the stock-raising point, and known by the name of Rawhide City.

It was a typical frontier camp, containing a mixture of many nationalities, from Chinaman and negro to Indian and Irish, while Mormons and Gentiles in creed were about equally divided, the former being the farmers, the latter the cattle-raisers, and the grand mixture the ranchmen on the farms, the ranches and about the stage station.

There was a tavern in the settlement, for the benefit of travelers on the Overland, but the main business done by the landlord was in running a saloon and a gambling den for the people in and about Rawhide City.

Texas Jack went at once to the tavern, known as Traveler's Ranch, and knowing the landlord he received a welcome that was apparently most cordial.

But Luke Dunn had a guilty conscience and he was always suspicious of any one from the fort, as he feared he was being caught in some of his sly deviltry, and he was most anxious to know the reason of Jack's visit.

"Say, Luke, run over the list of passengers who have gone through westward on the coaches the past month, or stopped with you while traveling on horseback, and say if you remember one answering to this description," and Jack took from his pocket a written description of Duke Dashwood, given him by Old Buckskin.

Luke gave a sigh of relief, and said:

"I allus gits ther autigraph of my gents, Texas Jack, and there is no use botherin' my brain readin' descriptions, when you kin glance over this book and see if his name is down, if you knows it."

Texas Jack stepped to the tavern register, some pads of paper tied with twine passed through holes cut on one side, and fastened into the outside corner of what had once been a large Bible, and with a smile at the queer make-up, he glanced over the names and dates.

The array was startling, for all who took a meal at the Traveler's Rest, were made to register, and some of the names were striking.

Presently the finger of the scout paused at one name, and he read aloud:

"DUKE DASHWOOD—

"Cosmopolitan."

"Here is my man, Duke."

"Yes, I remembers him particular, for he kilt a man here."

"Indeed?"

"Yas, he stopped over from one stage to another with me and was a perfect gent, ordering my best accommodations without asking the price and paying up without a word."

"So he got into a quarrel here did he?"

"Oh no; he wasn't in no quarrel."

"You said he killed a man here?"

"So he did, but there wasn't no row."

"How did it happen?"

"Well, there was a mean crittur of a man here known as P'izen Pete, and he jist run the lay-out, he and his gang, for the boys was afeard of him."

"Now P'izen Pete see the gent talkin' ter me, and he calls out that he were Silver Bullet Dick, and that he was his game, and then he gave a whoop for his gang and pulled his gun."

"Lord bless you, Jack, the gent drew, pulled trigger, kilt Pete, for he sent a bullet

between his eyes, and he didn't hardly stop talking to me, for he said he wanted to git a horse to ride over to Fort Vale."

"And the gang did not disturb him?"

"You bet they didn't!"

"Did he start for the fort?"

"No. I advised him to go on to Silver Nugget and he could get a horse, or a buckboard there along with a guide; but, does you remain long?"

"No; I will take the coach soon due through to Silver Nugget, letting my horse follow, which he will do like a dog, and not having weight to carry."

CHAPTER XXXV.

COFFIN TOM OF THE OVERLAND.

THE coach was not long in coming, and Texas Jack got dinner and then mounted with the driver.

He stripped his horse of saddle and bridle, and called to him to follow, which the faithful animal did.

The driver that Texas Jack rode with was known as "Coffin Tom."

He had long driven the Overland coaches, and once had been a Pony Express Rider, and was known as a man of nerve and deadly aim.

Wounded time and again, he could not be driven from the Overland, and was considered one of the best drivers on the trail.

Answering to the name of Tom Sands, he had gotten the prefix of coffin to his Christian name from the fact that the road-agents had posted placards with a coffin upon it, following which was a warning to Tom Sands to go off the road or he would be killed.

Instead, Tom had had a coffin built at his own expense, and in on the lid was painted:

"FOR THE BODY OF
ROAD-AGENT ROB."

Road-Agent Rob was the chief of the outlaw band who had made the lives of the drivers and passengers of the Overland one of suspense and misery, and he had put the warning up against Tom Sands to drive him off the trail, as he was not one to surrender at the demand of every mounted man who crossed his path and allow his coach to be looted.

On the contrary, he had several times brought the road-agent, stopping him, to earth, and had made himself a terror to them.

After securing the coffin Tom Sands put it on top of his coach, carrying it back and forth with him on his horse, and always saying:

"Some day I'll fetch it in full up with Road-Agent Rob."

On the same coach the day Texas Jack left Rawhide City with Coffin Tom was an army officer in uniform, accompanied by two private soldiers, and two other passengers who looked like well-to-do citizens, but tenderfeet as far as the Wild West was concerned.

Texas Jack had met Coffin Tom before and gloried in his pluck.

The two men entered into a conversation, the scout intending to find out if the driver knew anything about Duke Dashwood.

That P'izen Pete had been right in recognizing, in Dashwood, Silver Bullet Dick, Jack well knew, though he did not tell Dick Dunn, the landlord at the Traveler's Rest so.

He simply regarded that Dashwood had done a good deed in ridding the community of the desperado, and the better people about Rawhide City thought the same and were thankful to the handsome stranger.

Texas Jack at once, however, connected Dashwood's fate with P'izen Pete's band, and began to question Coffin Tom to find out all that he could.

"Know the gent you ask me about, Texas Jack?"

"Well, I should remark that I did know him, for he rode with me through to Silver Nugget sitting where you do, and he's a man clear through."

"You see, I laid off half the run on that trip, and so was there in Rawhide when he called in P'izen Pete's chip, and I never seen anything nenter done."

"Why, he were smokin' and talkin' to Luke Dunn, and he never took the weed from

between his lips or more than made a comma in his conversation.

"It saved Pete killin' me, or my killin' him some day for there was bad blood between us, and I have my suspicions he was one of Road-Agent Rob's band o' varmints."

"Did the gang follow the gentleman on to Silver Nugget?"

"I can't swear that they did, but I did see two of them in Nugget, and asked them why they wasn't at P'izen Pete's obsequies. Of course they got mad and told me to climb a tree, and pull it up after me; but I didn't do it, or hasn't yet," and Coffin Tom laughed heartily.

"Did Mr. Dashwood stop long in Nugget?"

"No, I guess not. He said he was going to get a horse and a pack-animal, for he had some things along with him on the coach, and a saddle and bridle too, and was going to ride to the fort."

"Alone?"

"So he said."

"I warned him that it was a long day's ride, and he said that if night overtook him, he could camp."

"And he went?"

"You bet, for when I told him that there were outlaws and Indians to fear, and he might get lost, too, he said that he wasn't altogether a tenderfoot, though he had been knocking about the world for some years, and he'd take chances on being his own guide."

"But, my, Jack! he were a handsome man, very much the style in face and form of your friend, Buffalo Bill, only he did not wear his hair long like him."

"Did not wear his hair long?" asked Texas Jack, quickly, as it flashed across his mind that the mangled form bound to the tree had had long hair, as the colonel had particularly said, and the major too.

"No; but he said he guessed he'd grow it if he stayed out on the frontier long."

"So he started for the fort?"

"Yes."

"And alone, you said?"

"He and his two pack-horses, for he bought three of the best animals in Silver Nugget."

"But, Jack, I'm awful glad you is along this trip, for I've got a valuable outfit aboard and somehow I've kinder dreaded a holdin' up by road-agents to-day," and in a low tone Coffin Tom added:

"I'll tell you a secret Jack."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HOLD-UP.

IN a low tone, Coffin Tom, bending over toward Texas Jack as he drove along, said:

"I say, I'm glad you are along, Jack, and I'll tell you why."

"All right, Tom."

"Word was given me to be cautious this run, as the officer in the coach is the new paymaster for Fort Vale, and he has considerable money with him to pay off the men."

"The two soldiers with him are guards; and, in addition to that, I've got the Overland Company's paymaster along—the smooth-faced gent inside dressed like a parson. He's going to pay off our crowd, beginning at Silver Nugget and working back."

"The other gent is booked for Silver Nugget, but I heard him tell the officer he was going to Fort Vale, where his youngest daughter was visiting her sister, Mrs. Grayson, and that she was soon to marry a young lieutenant, and he had all the wedding outfit along and lots of presents, and you see the coach is well loaded down with trunks."

"So he is going through with the paymaster, and they are to wait at Nugget for an escort of soldiers to be sent."

"You have indeed got a valuable load, Coffin Tom; but why do you dread a hold-up particularly on this trip?"

"Well, experience has taught me all I know, and there are men on this trail I suspect, living in Nugget, Rawhide City and Overlook Ranch, the three points that make up my run."

"I can't just get my hand on them, but I think they are in with Road-Agent Rob's gang and have posted him that I carry a rich load this trip, and with you along, the officer and the two soldiers, our paymaster, who is

a fighter from 'way back, the old gent, not to speak of myself, we might manage to carry Road Agent Rob into Nugget in his coffin, which I has along, as yer see, and has carried for over a year for his accommodation."

"Well, Tom, I only hope he may hold us up, if we can box Road Agent Rob," replied Texas Jack, more seriously.

"There must be a good deal of money along to defend, for it will take many thousands to pay off at the fort, and the monthly wages of your men will count up big, I know, while it will never do for pretty Miss Sophie Willis to lose her *trousseau*."

"Her what?"

"*Trousseau*."

"Come again, Jack."

"Her wedding outfit."

"Now you're talking, but before, you sprung Dago upon me. I hain't up in any lingo except American, and I guess the school-teacher would say as how I took liberties with that."

"No, she mustn't lose her outfit."

"Indeed not for she is a beautiful and lovely girl, is Miss Willis, and I heard her intended husband, Lieutenant Walter Wayne, who is a splendid fellow, had sent East for lots of presents for her, and many of the officers have done the same, too, for he is as popular as she is."

"They were to be sent, I remember, to the home of the young lady's father, and he was to fetch them through, as I heard the colonel say he had to send an escort, when he got word what time Judge Willis, for he's a U. S. judge, was to be at Rawhide."

"Now it seems he has kept on to Silver Nugget."

"That is on account of the paymaster going that way, and they'll have to carry the things over on buckboards they got at Nugget—but where is your horse, for he isn't following?"

"He has stopped to feed doubtless, but will soon catch up—say, hold right on, for I saw a man jump behind a rock just now, and here is where the hold-up will be," and turning his head slightly Texas Jack called though not in a loud voice.

"Inside the coach there—don't look out, but all be ready to fight, for we are going to be halted ahead here."

There were voices heard in the coach, but no one looked out.

Then a voice said:

"We are all ready and must fight, for we carry a most valuable load."

"Give us the signal!"

"Ay, ay, sir, it will be when I drop the man dead who halts us," was Texas Jack's cool response.

Coffin Tom had simply gathered his reins well in hand, and quickly slipped his revolver from his belt to the box seat.

Then he said:

"I didn't see any one, Jack, but I'm gambling on it they are there."

"That was the U. S. paymaster who answered you, and you bet they'll all fight, for the judge hain't no slouch."

"Which rock was it?"

"The one with the pine behind it."

"Good! Coaches has been stopped there before, and there's a couple of graves just off the trail."

"It was on that tree my warning was stuck up, and maybe I'll git a chance to use the coffin after all—you intend to drop him that halts us, you say?"

"Yes, the first man that shows himself is doomed."

"Steady now, for we are near the place, and I'm with you, Jack, tooth and claws."

"I know that, Coffin Tom," answered Texas Jack in a low tone, and hardly had he uttered the words when half a dozen men sprung from cover out into the trail, and one shouted in a sharp, commanding voice:

"Halt that coach, Tom Sands, and hands up all!"

With the utterance of the last word there was a sharp report from Texas Jack's revolver.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNLOOKED-FOR AID.

THERE were seven men in sight when Texas Jack fired, and the one who gave the command halting the coach, stood just in the center of the trail.

He had sprung, there, at a bound from behind the rock upon which the scout had his eye.

The other men had appeared upon each side, two of them springing to the heads of the leaders and grasping their bridles, and the other four leveling their revolvers at Texas Jack and Coffin Tom.

If there were others they had not yet shown themselves.

The road-agents had not expected resistance, that was certain, and Coffin Tom had whispered:

"That's Road Agent Rob!"

He spoke while the leader was giving his command to him to halt and hands up.

Texas Jack had fired with the quickness and deadly aim for which he was noted.

He had his hand already resting upon his revolver by his side, lying upon the seat, and to throw it forward, take rapid aim and pull trigger was the work of an instant.

A loud curse broke from the leader's lips, as he was falling, and tried hard to speak to his men; but, he went down in a heap in the trail.

The men at the heads of the leaders, startled and demoralized by the fall of their captain, let go their hold on the bridles, and, quick as a flash, Coffin Tom's whip descended, and at the same time he yelled to his team:

"Git ahead! Git!"

Texas Jack had fired a second shot by this time, and the man dropped his weapon with a cry of pain, while other road agents fired scattering shots, evidently at a loss just what to do.

But suddenly as the team and coach dashed over the body of the leader, who was trying to crawl out of the way, crushing the life out of him, thus finishing the work of the bullet, Coffin Tom reined up quickly, and with an oath cried out:

"My God!"

"They have blocked us!"

"We've got to fight it out right here, pard!"

Texas Jack's quick glance told what Coffin Tom meant, for he saw that the outlaws had stretched lariats across the stage trail, tied from tree to tree.

The nature of the ground would not admit of the coach going to either side, so that it was stopped by a fence of ropes that could not be passed.

"I'll cut the lariats, and you drive on!" shouted Texas Jack springing to the ground.

"I hain't that kind, Jack, to desert a pard," responded Coffin Tom, and he, too, sprung from the stage-box to the ground, just as the outlaws, with renewed confidence in themselves, as the coach was halted by the barrier, shouted wildly and opened fire once more, while answering shouts came from back in the timber, and half a dozen mounted road agents dashed into view, a hundred yards away.

The doors of the coach had now been thrown open, and out sprung the army officer with a revolver in each hand, and the two soldiers followed him with their rifles.

On the other side the Overland paymaster leaped out, ready for battle, and the judge was by his side, a revolver in his hand also.

The coach party saw that they were at a disadvantage, and outnumbered, but they decided to fight it out. Texas Jack had already dropped another outlaw as he ran to the lariat barrier, and Coffin Tom was advancing to meet others.

Just as Texas Jack slashed the lariat barrier down, the firing was hot on both sides. The mounted outlaws were near at hand, the one who led them shouting:

"Hold them, men, for we are with you!"

The road-agents on foot would have been easily put to flight, but for this reinforcement by their comrades, and they rallied to obey the order of the one who was now their leader.

"It's odds against us, pards, but die game!" shouted Texas Jack.

"Yes, stand firm and we may beat them off yet!" cried the army paymaster.

But, they were words of hope in the moment of despair, for the Overland paymaster was dead, the officer himself was slightly

wounded, one of the soldiers had been killed, and Coffin Tom had a severe wound in the leg.

"Wipe them all out! Show no mercy to any one!" commanded the mounted leader as he neared the scene, and all knew what they had to expect.

But, just then, help unlooked for came, for the rapid clatter of hoofs was heard, and Texas Jack's horse dashed into sight.

His coming had caused the road-agents to halt.

As they were about to dash on again into the fray, other hoofs were heard, and then came in ringing tones:

"Stand firm, men! The guard is at hand!"

With wild cries of rage the outlaws fled, while the same voice shouted:

"Drive that coach on with full speed!"

All saw but one horseman, and that was an Indian, but the command was obeyed quickly, Texas Jack saying:

"Tom, that was the voice of Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TEXAS JACK HEARS NEWS.

THE body of the Overland paymaster and the dead soldier were quickly thrown into the coach by the army officer and the remaining soldier, while Coffin Tom had hopped to the stage and clambered up to the box.

Texas Jack had shouldered the dead and crushed form of the outlaw leader, and running back with it had called out:

"Drag him up, Tom, for he's the fruit for your coffin."

Tom lost no time in dragging the body up; the judge sprung back into the coach with the others, and Texas Jack grasped the reins, telling the driver to bind up the wound in his leg as best he could.

On dashed the team, eager to go after the exciting scene they had passed through, and the invincible Texan handling the reins like an expert.

"Well, Pard Tom, I'm all mixed up," said Texas Jack as they drove along.

"How's that?"

"We got a temporary relief by the coming of my horse, for they thought aid was at hand."

"Sure, and he's keeping close behind now."

"Yes, and we were saved by the one who came to our rescue a moment after, for his words did the work."

"No doubt of that for they meant to wipe us out. But who was he, God bless him?"

"He was Buffalo Bill."

"He was an Injun, for I seen him fair, and he dashed up the trail, then back, and as we drove away he was in sight again—it was a Injun."

"Did you ever hear an Indian speak English as he did, Tom?"

"Now I think of it, I guess not."

"But what's Buffalo Bill playing Injun for?"

"He left the fort some time ago on a scout, and he may be disguised as an Indian."

"Fact."

"For some reason he did not seem to wish to come and join us, but he told us to do just what saved us. If he had not come when he did and stampeded the outlaws, we would have all been killed, for we were getting the worst of it, and the road-agents would have gotten a fortune from Uncle Sam, the Overland Company and Miss Sophie Willis's wedding outfit."

"Sure they would."

"And now I think of it, no Injun could give an order as he gave it. It was the voice of a man who knows how to command."

"I hope he had pards near."

"I fear not, Tom; but if any man can take care of himself, Buffalo Bill can. When we reach Silver Nugget, I will return and try and find him: in fact, we'll halt further on, and I'll saddle up there and ride back, for you can drive on after I have dressed your wound."

"You bet I can! Only I don't want to see you go back alone."

"That's my business, Tom, you know, and I guess I'll find Buffalo Bill; but don't say who it was; just speak of some Indians ap-

pearing and stampeding the outlaws, for I have my motive, Tom."

"I will, you bet, and I tell you I owe heaps to you, Jack, and Buffalo Bill, if it was your pard."

"Don't speak of it, Tom, for my life was at stake as well as yours, and Government property to defend."

"But, I'm awful sorry the Overland paymaster was killed, and the soldier, while the officer was slightly wounded, too."

"Yes, and didn't they all fight game?"

"Indeed they did."

"And the judge got there with both feet."

"I tell you, we'd have been wiped out quick, but for their game fighting."

"But, we got my man for the coffin, and I counted four road-agents go under."

"Yes, and several were wounded."

"There were nine in the lot on foot, and seven more were coming on horseback, making sixteen in all."

"Sixteen against seven of us, Jack, and one man turned the tide in our favor, and that one man, you say, was Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, ten to one on it, Tom."

"But, we are all of ten miles from the hold-up point, now, and it's not many more to Silver Nugget, I guess; so, when we reach yonder timbered hill, at the base of which I remember there is a stream, I'll dress your wound, and then put back on my horse to see if I can find Buffalo Bill," said Texas Jack.

"You know best, Jack; but I'm sorry you will not go on with me to Silver Nugget, as I'm going to try my luck to-night ag'in' the Queen of Rubies."

"Who?" asked Texas Jack, quickly, glancing at Coffin Tom, while he recalled when he had heard of the Queen of Rubies. Old Buckskin, at the request of Colonel Kent, having told him the story of Duke Dashwood, that the scout might go on the search for him with his eyes fully opened to catch at any clue to discover who had taken his life.

"Yes, that's her name."

"Who is she?"

"Ask me something easy, Jack."

"Do you know nothing about her?"

"Well, she came to Silver Nugget a few weeks ago and opened a gamblin' den. It is known as the 'Lucky Card.' She bought out the man who was running it."

"She's a beautiful woman, too, and she's got rubies to throw to the birds."

"How old is she?"

"Don't know. Who does? for she's a woman, and no man can tell the age of a feminine."

"Is she a young girl?"

"I guess not, and if I was gambling on her age I'd say she was about thirty-five, though she looks younger."

"She's dead game, runs her den for money, allows no nonsense and some of the boys have raked in a big pile o' chips there, and I was going to risk a hundred to-night."

"Don't do it, Tom, for that woman will get your money, mark my words."

"Do you know her, Jack?"

"No, only I have heard of her; for she was down in the lower mining country years ago, for she must be the one I refer to."

"But, here we are at the bill, and that wound of yours is bleeding freely and must be stopped," and Texas Jack drew rein on the banks of a small stream fringed with timber.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE HALF.

HAVING gotten down from the box, Texas Jack called out:

"We halt here, gentlemen, to dress Coffin Tom's wound, for it is bleeding freely, and maybe some one else may wish looking after."

"Are you a surgeon?" asked Judge Willis, getting out of the coach and addressing Jack.

"Only a scrub one, sir, to do my best when there is no one else around to help a wounded man."

"Well, perhaps I can help for I left the practice early in life to study law, and had some experience with wounds in the Mexican war, for I was then a regimental surgeon."

"Then please, look after poor Tom, sir," said Jack.

"Certainly, for I have dressed the captain's wound as I came along," and the judge referred to the paymaster, and continued:

"I saw you in action, sir, and must compliment you upon your most valuable services."

"You were fortunate not to be killed, exposing yourself as you did."

"You were, indeed, my man; and I would like to know your name. I am Captain Enos Knapp, army paymaster, and I shall make a full report to Colonel Kent of this attack on us, and of your bravery and that of the driver."

"Capt'n, this is Texas Jack, for I'll inter-dooce him, and he's lieutenant of Buffalo Bill's company of scouts and is stationed at Fort Vale," explained Coffin Tom.

Captain Knapp at once grasped Jack's hand warmly and said:

"I have heard often of you, Texas Jack, and I know your chief, Buffalo Bill, having met him some years ago."

The captain then presented Texas Jack to Judge Willis, who greeted him warmly, and said that his daughters had frequently written him of Buffalo Bill and his brave scouts.

"It is a secret, gentlemen, my being along, and I do not care to have it mentioned at Silver Nugget."

"But, as I am going back on the trail from here, Captain Knapp, I shall be obliged if you will tell Colonel Kent where you left me, and that I believe I am in a fair way to make a discovery of importance. He will understand, sir."

"I will tell him."

"But, you are not going back alone on the trail?"

"Yes, sir; for I believe the one who came to our aid is a man I am most anxious to find."

"I did not see him, but the judge did, and said that it was an Indian, though I cannot think so, as I heard his voice and words and no red skin speaks as he did."

"He was, in my opinion, Captain Knapp, a white man disguised as an Indian, and that I am going to find out."

"Well, in spite of your plucky fight, and all we did, we owe our escape to him, be he red-skin or white man."

"I was deeply pained to lose one of my men. Also the Overland paymaster was shot dead, while the driver and myself were wounded, my hurt being a bullet through the arm, but not serious."

"I trust Coffin Tom is not badly hurt."

"He got a bullet in the leg, sir."

"No, it is not dangerous, though it was a close call from breaking the bone," called out the judge, who was dressing the hurt.

"Fortunately," he added, "I never travel without my combined surgical and medicine case, so I was able to extract the bullet, which was checked by the bone."

The wound was soon dressed, and by that time Texas Jack had called his horse up and saddled and bridled him.

He always went provided with his provisions and camping outfit, and these were taken from the coach and strapped on his saddle.

"Come, Pard Jack, don't go without helping me to place Road-Agent Rob in his box, for I owe it to your shot that I got him, and the coach simply finished your work."

"We'll box him, and I'll take him into Silver Nugget, toes up."

The scout leaped upon the wheel, was soon on the coach, and, with the aid of the soldier, the body of the dead road-agent captain was soon in the coffin, the lid being left off.

The bodies of the dead Overland paymaster and soldier were then laid at length on the top of the coach, and Coffin Tom crawled up to the box and grasped the reins.

"Well, Texas Jack, I suppose you'll not get into Silver Nugget before we leave, as the colonel will doubtless have an escort then?" said Captain Knapp.

"The colonel spoke of your expected coming some time next week, sir."

"Did he not get a letter from me saying I was coming ten days sooner?"

"I am sure that he did not, sir."

"When did you leave the fort?"

"Not twenty-four hours ago, sir. The

colonel expected me to go to Silver Nugget and said nothing about your being there."

"When did the last mail go in?"

"Four days ago, sir, and another is not due for three days."

"Then my letter missed in some way; but, we can get buckboards at Silver Nugget and push through, judge, rather than wait several days for an escort."

"By all means, captain."

"If you do, captain, go as soon after reaching Silver Nugget as possible and do not delay long enough to let some of the lawless men there head you off on the trail," urged Texas Jack; and with a good-by to all, he started back on the trail for the scene of the hold-up, Coffin Tom calling out:

"I'll share with you, Jack, all that Road-Agent Rob pans out."

CHAPTER XL.

THE SCOUT'S FIND.

TEXAS JACK rode on the back trail, thoroughly conscious of the danger that he was running, yet feeling certain that the man they had seen disguised as an Indian was none other than Buffalo Bill.

"After all, dear old Bill is not dead, as I felt sure he was not in spite of the seeming proof that he had gone over the cliff."

"For some reason he was disguised as an Indian chief, and he was very careful not to let the outlaws get a glimpse of him, I thought, for he disappeared so suddenly after coming in sight of the stage."

"But, his voice rung like a trumpet and I am very sure the voice was his."

"Well, I'll soon know, but I must go slow or the gang may be there and jump me."

So mused Texas Jack as he rode at a canter back for the scene of conflict.

His horse kept up a steady gait, not having felt his gallop without any weight.

Thus the miles were gone over until the scout was within a mile of the hold-ups.

Then he rode on at a walk, his repeating rifle, a splendid Winchester, held across his saddle ready for use.

Approaching nearer, he dismounted, threw his bridle-rein over the horn of his saddle, and walked on ahead, his well trained horse awaiting patiently until called.

Soon the call came, a shrill whistle, and the horse moved on at a slow trot.

Coming up with his rider he was again left, the scout going on ahead, and then, after a while came another whistle.

The horse instantly obeyed it.

This was repeated half a dozen times, the scout going ahead through the timber, not to be caught in an ambush, and then calling his horse up to join him.

After half an hour Texas Jack came upon the scene of the attack upon the coach.

He was still on foot, his horse several hundred yards back down the trail.

After a glance about him Texas Jack muttered:

"They have not been back, so all is safe here."

With this he called his horse up, and the faithful animal stood patiently by, while his rider looked about him.

The first thing that caught his eye was the lariat that had formed the barrier and which he had cut down.

The ends were still about the trees on either side the trail, and just beyond lay the dead body of an outlaw.

Texas Jack walked up to it, removed the mask from the face and said aloud:

"I have seen that man before."

Over on one side of the trail lay another silent form, and the mask was torn from the face.

"Ah! a miner from Silver Nugget. I have seen him there often."

"As I have thought, the road-agents are doubtless men who hang out in Rawhide City and Silver Nugget, pretending to be honest cowboys and miners."

"Now to the others."

There was a red stain upon the ground where the outlaw captain had fallen and afterward been driven over, and from this the scout turned to the side of the trail where he had seen other road-agents go down.

One of the mounted party had lost a horse, and still saddled and bridled the animal lay off the trail, a bullet in his head.

Two other bodies of outlaws were found, but when unmasked the scout failed to recognize them as any one he had before seen.

"Five, counting Road-Agent Rob.

"Not a bad day's work for us, and a severe blow to the agents, for they seldom get shot of late.

"Road Agent Rob has gone under, but the one who came up with the relief seemed a bold leader.

"Now to see what the outfit pans out," and Texas Jack went from one to the other of the bodies and searched them.

"I will leave the party Coffin Tom will send out from Nugget to bury them, while I try to strike the trail of the man I claim was Buffalo Bill."

The search of the bodies "panned out," as Jack expressed it, considerable money, some jewelry, a couple of good repeating rifles, half a dozen revolvers, and a saddle and bridle.

"I'll cache my find to return for another day, and then set out to follow that trail," and gathering the things together Jack packed them on his horse to hide some distance away from the scene.

Walking along the trail, his horse following, he soon came to the spot where the horseman, Indian or pale-face, had been seen.

Readily he picked up the trail, and was following it back through the timber, when, suddenly, from behind a group of rocks, came the sharp command:

"Hands up, Texas Jack!"

CHAPTER XLI.

AGAIN A PRISONER.

THE reader will recall how Buffalo Bill, upon the scene where he had once so nearly met his doom, and where he had found the mangled remains of an unknown bound to the same tree where he had been a prisoner, had just started to mount his horse to return to the camp when he heard a wild yell, and, ere he could grasp a weapon, he was felled to the ground by a severe blow.

He had gathered the pieces of clothing, the boots and the hat of the man who had so mysteriously died there, and had buried the mangled remains, the lantern he had with him lighting him in the work.

A moment more and he would have been gone.

But, keen eyes had seen the glare of the lantern through the trees and the one who beheld it had crept nearer and nearer as noiseless as a phantom.

He had seen the scout's form, and as the glare of the lantern fell full upon his face he was not ten feet from him and crouching like a wild beast to spring upon its prey.

That flash of the lantern revealed the face of Buffalo Bill.

There was no mistake, for the scout's was not a face one could forget.

Then a wild cry of mingled fright and rage burst from the lips of the one who beheld the face the lantern had revealed, and with the bound of a tiger he was at the back of the scout, a terrible blow came crashing downward and Buffalo Bill dropped his length upon the ground.

"Great God! it was no ghost that I struck, but real flesh and blood.

"I saw his mangled remains here where I had left him, bound to this tree, and I believed that the wolves had torn him to pieces.

"To-night I came back to bury him, for it is bad luck to leave human bones unburied, and I behold, as I believed, his ghost standing here!

"But, my blow has felled him, and he lies stunned at my feet.

"I have scoffed at the dead's returning to the earth in spirit form, but for a moment I was wild with sudden terror.

"No, it was not Buffalo Bill who died, whom the wolves tore to pieces, for he lies here at my feet, once again wholly in my power.

"This time I will be sure that there is no escape for him when I get ready to strike at his life.

"But he shall serve me, and serve me well, for he shall aid me to kill those whom I hate.

"Now to bind him beyond escape, and when he comes back to consciousness, he shall go with me."

The man who had stood over the scout and thus mused aloud, was, as the reader has doubtless conjectured, the Mad Giant who had before proven such a cruel foe to Buffalo Bill.

There was no change in his wild appearance, either in face or attire, and as he ceased his musings he took the scout's lariat, which had had served so well before, and securely bound his hands behind his back.

His next move was to take the scout's large sombrero, fill it with water at the stream, and dash it into his face with the muttered words:

"I hope he is not dead."

But Buffalo Bill had rallied from the stunning blow just as he found himself bound, and though still half dazed he knew who his captor was.

Not anticipating the dash of water, or caring for a repetition of it, he said calmly:

"No, I am not dead, and I only wish I had let you know the fact, a moment sooner."

"Not dead! How glad I am," said the Mad Giant, with a growl.

"Why?"

"Because I will have the pleasure of seeing you die!"

If he had expected his words would unnerve the scout he was mistaken, for the cool response came:

"No doubt; but, you had me foul once before and I am still on earth."

The mad man-slayer turned quickly and asked:

"How did you get free?"

"Guess."

"Some one set you free, and in return you tied him to the tree and let the wolves devour him."

"You are a gigantic old liar," angrily returned Buffalo Bill, for the charge against him cut him severely, that he could be thought, even by a foe, to be capable of so cruel a deed.

The madman raised his hand, as though about to strike, and then lowering it quickly said:

"No, not yet! I can wait, for your time of torture has not yet come."

There was something fiendish in the words and tone and the scout made no reply.

Then the captor asked:

"How did you get free?"

"Guess again."

"Who was the man whom the wolves devoured?"

"Do you not know?"

"No."

"Who set you free?"

"I was set free by a friend."

"Why did you come here to-night?"

"I saw to-day the body tied to the tree and came to-night to bury it, for I am human, at least."

"Did you bury it?"

"I did."

"Well, there is much you can tell me that I would know; so mount your horse. I will walk."

"Where?"

"You will see," was the reply of the giant.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MADMAN'S CUNNING.

BUFFALO BILL did not resist.

He was studying the nature of his captor as best he could.

That he really was insane the prisoner felt convinced, and the thought struck him that he might humor him into a certain friendship for him, which in the end would be to his advantage.

So he arose, and bound as he was, had to ask the aid of the madman to mount.

It was given in an unexpected way, for the giant simply raised him as one would a child, and placed him in the saddle.

"You are the most powerful man I ever saw, pard, for I weigh some pounds over two hundred," said the scout.

The madman seemed pleased with the compliment, and Cody took note of that fact.

He was then tied to his saddle, his weap-

ons were hung to the horn, but so that he could not get hold of them, and, taking the bridle reins, the captor started off in an opposite direction from the camp.

"You are not going to the camp, pard," intimated the scout.

"I have just come from there."

"Ah! did you see the colonel, for I spoke to him of you?"

"No, but he heard of me from other than you, to-night."

"Who was that?"

"I killed three of his guards."

"What?" and Buffalo Bill started at what he heard.

"I shot three of his sentinels."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To night."

"But you were here!"

"I had just come from the camp when I saw your lantern."

"And you killed three men?"

"I did."

"And got away?"

"Bah! I care nothing for your soldier guards and scouts."

"Of course I got away, as I have before and will again—yes, will now, taking with me Buffalo Bill, the chief of army scouts."

"You are a most wonderful man."

Again the madman seemed pleased, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"Tell me how you did it?"

"I'll tell you that I killed them as I have many a man before."

"Where?"

"Is the death of a soldier and a scout so light an affair at Fort Vale that your take no note of it?"

"But this was not at Fort Vale."

"Have there been no mysterious deaths of sentinels at Fort Vale, and of you scouts while on the trail?"

Buffalo Bill gave a long whistle. His eyes seemed to be suddenly opened to something that surprised him, and he said:

"Yes, Indians have picked off several sentinels at the fort of late, and also I have lost two scouts in the same way."

"It is no such thing, for Indians did not do it."

"Who did?"

"I did! I picked off three soldiers and two scouts, and I killed to night two more soldiers and one scout."

"Nor is that all, for I picked off others to-day, in the battle, and had I been on the cliff that daring rider would never gone through the canyon with the news of our being ambushed on the cliffs."

"Who was he?"

"I might as well tell you that I made the ride."

"It was just like you. Some of the Indians said it was you, but I thought you were dead, so laughed at them."

"Why are you so revengeful toward the soldiers?"

The madman halted, stepped back to the side of the horse and seemed about to burst forth in a rage.

But, suddenly checking himself, he said in a low, almost pathetic tone:

"I have cause to be—I am a soldier-slayer."

Then he walked ahead once more, and as he did not answer several of the scout's questions the latter became silent, also.

Day had dawned, and the madman passed on at a swinging walk that kept Buffalo Bill's horse at a trot to keep up with him.

The scout had congratulated himself upon the fact that his men would track them; but, when day dawned, he took notice that the madman left no trail.

When he walked along over rocky soil, he did so with a very light tread for a man of his size, and with the cunning of a mad creature he was prepared well for the soil that would leave a trail.

Now the scout understood his halts during the night, which he did not understand.

Instinctively his captor had halted when the soil was soft, and now the daylight revealed that he had hung to his rope belt four feet, claws and all, of a grizzly bear.

He would pull them on over his moccasins, for they were made like sandals, and there would be the tracks apparently of a huge bear.

At other places, when he could go around and let the horse continue straight on, he did so.

Again, he would reverse the bear-foot sandals, and the animal would appear to be going in the opposite direction!

Then, at other times, he would leap up behind Buffalo Bill, and the horse would carry him for several hundred yards over soft soil.

Thus, he left no trail that even the most experienced scout could follow, though Buffalo Bill muttered:

"He's a dandy and no mistake! But, he over-calculates his own cunning, for a blind man could follow the trail of this horse, and some men who are not blind will do so."

CHAPTER XLIII.

COVERING UP HIS TRACKS.

If Buffalo Bill thought that the giant was over-matching himself, he was very much mistaken, as he found later in the day, and his admiration for the soldier-slayer's cunning greatly increased.

After the sun had been up a couple of hours, and the giant made no halt, moving on with no thought of rest or breakfast, Buffalo Bill said:

"Say, pard, I've got a bag of provisions along, so suppose we have something to eat?"

"Not here.

"Wait," was the answer.

The man went along like one who knew just where he was going, never at a loss, and with the same care to disguise his own tracks, while he made no effort to hide the trail of the horse ridden by his prisoner.

At last they drew near a cliff, where there was an open space in the timber, looking out upon a grand view.

To the ears of the scout there came the roar of a torrent, and he knew that a stream ran along at the base of the cliff.

Taking the bear's-foot sandals from his belt, the madman fitted the hind claws upon the feet of Buffalo Bill.

Then he untied the rope beneath the saddle and bade his prisoner dismount.

The scout did so.

Next he took off the saddle and bridle, with the bag of provisions, belt of arms, roll of blankets and the bundle of the unknown victim's clothes, books, and hats, and fastened all upon his own broad shoulders.

His next act was to take a piece of blanket and tie it over the head of the cavalry horse.

Buffalo Bill watched his every move with curiosity and interest.

This done he grasped the horse by the mane, and led him forward in a walk.

The animal thus led, with perfect confidence in man, although he heard the roar of the torrent, but could not see the cliff, followed him faithfully.

Then Buffalo Bill recognized how the madman had made no mistake in not hiding the trail of the horse.

He saw his cruel purpose, and unable to prevent, he yet called out:

"Great God, man! don't be guilty of an act so inhuman as to kill that poor horse."

"You are worse than a brute!"

But the madman only smiled malignly and kept on leading the poor horse to his doom.

As he neared the edge of the cliff, the madman stepped aside, the horse kept on and over his next step went.

He tried to recover himself, but in vain, and with a shriek that was human in its fright, the animal plunged downward, the madman laughing merrily and standing on the very edge of the precipice and coolly looking down to see his dumb victim strike the water.

Buffalo Bill's temper was up, but his good sense controlled him, and he simply said:

"He fell into the river, did he not?"

"Yes; did you not hear the splash? It was as loud as a cannon. Now you'll have to walk, but it is not far."

"The Indian village is a long way off, away over yonder in those mountains."

"We are not going to the Indian village."

"Ah!" and the prisoner had the relief of knowing this much, at least.

"Where are we going?"

"To my den, for I live like a wild beast."

"Is it far?"

"Why?"

"I am a little lame, you see, and cannot walk well with these things on my feet."

"I will carry you."

"Oh no; never mind; but must I wear these bear-claws?"

"Yes, for I leave no boot-track behind me."

"All right! Jump ahead, old man, and I'll follow you."

The scout saw that there was no use to argue with the madman, so accepted the situation.

When they reached the end of the ridge the madman halted, took the bear's feet off of Buffalo Bill's boots and said:

"We must climb down here, for, as you see, no horse could come this way."

"Yes, and it's dizzy work for a man."

"If you are dizzy I'll aid you."

"Go ahead; don't mind me."

The madman swung over the cliff. The scout followed, and the two made their way slowly down the steep mountain-side for over a mile.

Then they came to a canyon in the ridge, yet some distance up from the valley below.

Into this the madman turned, and the scout saw that it was, after going back from the entrance, a small and fertile valley in which there was a deep, clear pool of water, with plenty of grass about it.

To his delight, the scout also recognized his own splendid horse, which the madman had hidden away where he before became a prisoner.

The hard ride had not hurt the animal in the least, for he came at a gallop toward his master, whom he knew at a glance.

"The horse knows you."

"Yes, I thought you had ridden him to death."

"No; he's a splendid beast, hard to kill. I found him where I had left him rested and all right, so brought him here."

"There is my den, and there you will remain until I decide just how you are to die," and the madman pointed to a cavern in the side of the cliff overlooking the little valley.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE MADMAN'S DEN.

BUFFALO BILL gazed about him with strange interest, regarding the hidden valley, the cliff, cave and all within his vision.

What that retreat of the madman meant to him he did not know, and it might be, he thought, that there his life would end.

But he was not the man to despair and fed on the motto:

"Where there is life there is hope."

The madman led him toward the cliff in which was his cavern.

The latter was concealed in a clump of pine trees that grew close to the cliff.

Behind them Buffalo Bill saw an opening in the rock.

Approaching nearer the scout saw that the cavern entrance was arched and about the size of a church door, and through it light enough shone to reveal the interior.

It was indeed a den, as the madman had called it, running back some thirty feet, and about ten feet in width.

In the further end was a bed of bear and buffalo robes, and several blankets.

Near the entrance there was a natural fireplace; the smoke going up through a split in the rocks.

Rocks served as andirons, and the cooking utensils were a frying-pan, coffee-pot and skillet, with a tin cup, plate and knife and fork.

A hollow log, supported on rocks served as a cupboard, and a deer hung in the entrance of the cave.

A couple of muskets had been ingeniously fitted as a trap in the rear of the cavern, and lariats stretched across and passing across the trigger, so that any one entering, and not knowing the combination, would be killed.

A wolf lying dead in the mouth of the cave showed that even his light touch had set off one of the muskets, which were loaded with buckshot and made him a victim, as he was trying to kidnap the deer-meat, and red trails leading away told that others had been wounded and sent howling away.

While the madman was unspringing his death-trap the scout had a chance to take in the cave and its surroundings.

But what particularly struck his attention was a group of graves under the pines.

There were five of them, and at each was a strange head-board.

The head-boards told the story, and a sad one.

At one was a cavalry carbine, at another a trooper's saber, while two more had muskets at the head, and the fifth a bowie-knife was driven through the broad-brimmed sombrero of a scout.

The madman had kept trophies of his victims to mark their graves with.

Though having only two revolvers in his belt, and a large knife, and with a rope only as a belt, there were weapons in plenty in the cavern, and belts, too.

"Well, this is my den, and here you are to be my prisoner, Buffalo Bill."

"See here, I can keep even you here, for, though I have not the luxuries of a home, I have the necessities for a man of my calling."

He went to the rear of the cavern as he spoke and came back with a long and heavy chain, and some irons.

The scout then noticed that a chain hung down through the chimney crevice in the rocks, and to this the madman fastened one end of the chain he held in his hand, locking them together with a stout padlock.

Unbinding the hand of the scout he then put handcuffs on his wrists, connected by a chain several feet in length.

Then he placed a manacle around one ankle, and locked the end of the chain to it, which gave the scout some thirty feet of space to go to and fro, in and out of the cave.

"I guess you are safe now, and so we'll have something to eat," said the madman with one of his cunning leers, which meant so much.

"Ah, yes. I'll be quite comfortable, if you will only let me have my roll of blankets here, for I see that you have the roll that was on my own horse, as well as the saddle and bridle, and you have the other outfit, too."

"We'll be quite at home, pard, and I'll do the cooking."

The madman threw the scout both rolls of blankets, and the provisions, while he took a tin bucket to the pool for water.

Buffalo Bill was hungry, and was going to have a good square meal.

He would let the future take care of itself, and just then look out for the present.

So, when the madman brought the water he set to work and got up a really good repast.

His captor ate like a wild beast and seemed to enjoy it.

Then the scout took from his traps which had been last captured with him, a pipe and tobacco and gave it to the man, he smoking his other pipe.

The madman enjoyed it greatly and as night was near at hand went to his bed back in the cavern and was soon fast asleep.

Buffalo Bill sat for a long time in thought, but as night fell he spread his blankets and also retired.

The night passed without any disturbance, but the dawn of day found the madman up and he went for water as though anxious to have the scout prepare breakfast.

This Buffalo Bill did and the madman again ate ravenously and afterward enjoyed his smoke, the scout filling the pipe for him.

Then his captor found another bucket somewhere and brought them both filled with water from the pool.

"This will have to last you for several days, for I am going away," he said.

"Where?"

"To the Indian village," and the madman gave a cunning leer.

"All right, I'll keep house until you get back."

"You can't get away."

"Don't want to—I'd rather live here with you."

The man smiled as though pleased, and then, after seeing that the scout was secure, he started off from the cavern without uttering another word and Buffalo Bill was left alone, in irons!

CHAPTER XLV.

A DESPERATE SITUATION.

THERE was something about his mad captor that could not but impress Buffalo Bill strangely, and cause him to feel both pity and admiration for him as well as abhorrence at his deeds.

"Poor fellow," the scout mused as the Mad Giant strode away from the cabin:

"I cannot but feel sorry for him though he has doubtless gone to arrange with the Indians for a barbecue, I furnishing the roast.

"I wonder he did not force me to go with him.

"I do not believe the Indians know where he lives, or if they do, are a bit sociable with him knowing how he has the guns arranged to greet them with half a pound of buck-shot if they come in his absence.

"I guess the wolves will be a few chips shy of this place, after the reception they got.

"Well, he says he has gone to the Indian village.

"But has he?

"May he not be hiding somewhere over yonder in the rocks to see if I am going to escape?

"I'll just think it over before I make any move in that direction; but it looks to me easy to get away as I now take in the situation, and there is my own splendid horse awaiting me, with my saddle, bridle and weapons here, only he has taken good care to put all the rifles and revolvers beyond my reach."

So the scout sat musing upon the strange man and his own situation, and after awhile continued:

"Now that man has been made to suffer by the army in some way, and has vowed vengeance against soldiers and all connected with them.

"Whatever the wrong, it crazed him, and he is a very dangerous wild animal to be allowed to run loose, though I would hate to have to kill him, because he is mad and therefore not responsible."

All through the morning the scout sat lost in thought and then he arose and cooked his dinner.

The madman's not coming back made him believe he had gone to the Indian village, which was about forty miles away, the scout reckoned.

After he had eaten his dinner and smoked his pipe he began to consider about escaping.

He first tried the strength of the chains that held him fast.

They were too large and strong to break.

Then Buffalo Bill tugged at the chain at once, hoping it might not be securely fastened after passing through the crevice in the rocks.

But it withstood all pulls and his weight as well.

His next effort was to break the chains with the rocks taken from the fire-place.

But, this was also in vain.

Raising a large rock above his head then, and passing the chain that held his leg fast, over the edge of another rock, he hurled the other down upon it with full force.

This was repeated time and again, but the chain was too stout to be thus broken.

The scout had not expected this, and he began to feel as night came on that his situation was indeed a desperate one.

His disappointment in not being able to escape made him care but little for supper, and he did not cook any, only ate a piece of cold venison and a cracker.

Late into the night he sat musing, trying to think of some way in which to free himself of his irons.

But in vain, for the steel cuffs about his wrists, and the iron manacle around his left ankle, held him firmly.

At last he sunk to sleep, and when he awoke the sun was rising.

The madman had not returned, and then across the mind of Buffalo Bill came the terrible thought that if he had not been killed he would remain there in irons and starve to death.

This fearful thought set the scout to work again with all his will to try and get free.

But, though he tried over the same schemes of the day before, all were in vain,

and night coming on found him still a prisoner.

Now he began to hope, as he sat there on his blanket bed, gazing into the fire as it died out slowly, that the madman would return.

It would be far better than remaining there to die a lingering death, until he became too weak to fight off the wolves that would rush upon him and finish what starvation had begun.

Should the madman return, he made up his mind that he would at once plan some bold plot to escape by striking him down when he came near him, and thus getting possession of the keys of his manacles.

But, a second night had come since the madman's departure, and he had not returned.

It was no wonder that even the brave heart or Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border, began to feel despair at his desperate situation.

Suddenly, as he sat there musing bitterly at his lot, he started.

His ears had detected a sound that he knew was not made by a wolf!

He listened attentively, and felt a pang of relief as he heard a step and saw a form in the darkness, for he felt that the madman had returned.

Another moment, and the form stood in the glare of the dying embers.

But, it was not the madman.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SILENT VISITOR.

THE scout could not resist a start as his eyes fell upon the form that had appeared before him.

Where he had expected to see the Mad Avenger, the embers still glowing in the cavern revealed to him a form he had seen before.

It was the muffled form that he had seen once before, when it came to his rescue when he was bound to the tree.

"What! do you again come to my relief?" asked the scout quickly and he arose to his feet.

There was no response and Buffalo Bill added:

"You appear like a phantom, and are as silent—indeed, did I believe in ghosts, I would say that you were one, to thus know when I was in deadly peril."

Still no answer from the blanketed form.

The head was covered with a hood which shielded the face, only two holes enabling the scout to see the eyes.

The Unknown stood a moment taking in the situation, and seemed to realize that the scout had done all in his power to escape, for he strode into the cavern further than the chain enabled Buffalo Bill to go, and finding there the lantern, which the madman had brought along, lighted it and began to search about in silence.

The scout saw that the blanket enveloped the arms and hands as well, of his rescuer, for he felt that was why he had come there.

Failing to find what he was apparently looking for, the rescuer returned to the fire, picking up the chain, passed it through his hands as near the scout's leg as possible, and then throwing more wood on the fire laid it in it.

At once Buffalo Bill saw what the intention was, to heat the links red-hot and then to break them.

"Well, you are a good one and no mistake, and what a monumental fool I was not to think of the same thing.

"Will you not make yourself known to me?"

There was no response, only the rescuer took up the knife which Buffalo Bill had used in cutting the deer meat, but which the madman had overlooked, and looking about for a rock found one and stood waiting for the links to get red-hot.

The scout now knowing just what his rescuer meant to do, aided him by first placing his right wrist as near the fire as he could, to heat the links within a few inches of the manacle on that hand.

The rescuer took up pieces of wood and shielded the hand and wrist from the blaze, and, as soon as the links grew red, he held the chain across the knife and brought the rock hard down upon it.

A few blows and the chain was cut in twain! The scout's right hand was free, save for the manacle upon it with a couple of the links hanging to it!

The manacle was very hot, but this Buffalo Bill did not care for under the circumstances.

The chain hanging to the left wrist was then placed in the fire, and while they were waiting for the links to get red hot Buffalo Bill again spoke to his good Samaritan.

But the same silence as before was maintained by the muffled form.

The chain on the left wrist was severed by the rescuer, and then with his arms free, save for the manacles about his wrists, the scout aided in his deliverance by quickly placing the chain attached to the manacle about his leg into the fire.

This was quite a large chain, with heavy links, and it was put into the fire as close up to the ankle as possible without burning the flesh.

It took longer to heat it through, and when it became red hot the rescuer laid it across the knife, and, after several blows one half of the link was cut through.

Then the mysterious artificer put the chain again in the fire, to heat it red hot once more, and when he took it out and laid it across the knife he handed the rock to Buffalo Bill and silently pointing to the chain arose quickly and glided out of the cavern.

In vain did Buffalo Bill call to him, for he disappeared in the darkness, and, realizing that he was not yet wholly free, the scout grasped the knife with one hand, and brought the rock down upon the chain across it with the other.

It took several blows to cut into the iron half way, when, aware that it was cooling rapidly, the scout arose and twisting it with all his strength broke the half-cut iron in twain.

He could hardly restrain from a shout when he felt himself free, and darted out of the cavern in search of his friend in need.

He could not at first see in the darkness, and when he did there stood his splendid horse fastened to a pine tree of the group about the graves!

Quickly the scout returned to the cavern, seized his saddle, bridle and outfit, buckled on his belt of arms, and slinging his rifle at his back, lost no time in saddling his horse, mounting, and riding out of the canyon.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LASSO AS A WEAPON.

IT was with a glad heart that Buffalo Bill rode out of the canyon, for he was a free man once more.

If it came then to a combat with the madman, man to man with weapons, he was willing to meet the alternative.

In fact, as he rode along he made up his mind that it was his duty to capture the man.

He must make him a prisoner, and thus prevent him from doing no end of harm.

The more he thought of it the more he decided what his course should be.

"Yes, I will camp for the night down in the valley, and return on foot to-morrow to the canyon and have it out with the mad soldier-slayer.

"I do not wish to take his life, and will not if I can help it, but if it must be, then his life will have to be the forfeit, or mine. If he goes free, other poor soldiers will suffer."

The scout continued on down the steep trail, leading his horse, and after a rough time of it reached the valley.

He was in an unknown country to him, save the glance he had taken of it when the prisoner of the madman.

But he had the points of the compass, and Buffalo Bill has always been noted for being an expert in finding out a country and in going through it unerringly.

After a search, he found a good camping-place, and among his things he discovered his box of matches, so determined to build a fire, and make himself comfortable, for if the madman had gone to the Indian village he would not pass near the spot where he then was.

The scout was anxious, too, to look over his weapons and have them in good trim.

The fire was not a large one, just enough to enable him to see well, and after staking his horse out he sat down to look over his outfit.

He had just begun to overhaul his things when a startled exclamation broke from his lips.

In spite of his nerve his face paled, and eagerly he looked over weapon after weapon, and turning over his outfit searched closely through it.

"Well! if this is not a pretty mess I'm greatly off in calculation, for that madman has unloaded my revolvers and rifle, and I have not a charge with me to load them with!

"I have my knife, and that is the only weapon I can defend myself with.

"I guess I won't look the madman up, to-morrow; but, instead, must take mighty good care that he does not find me.

"Come, old horse, this is no place for us, for we don't wish to be caught unable to defend ourselves.

"Let me see: I can go to Silver Nugget quicker than to the fort by a day's ride, so there I'll go and fit out with provisions and ammunition, and then I'll come back and give my mad friend a call.

"Yes, I'll push on to-night for some hours before I camp, and to-morrow I will go on to Silver Nugget.

"From there I can write a letter to Colonel Kent, to let him know that I am all right, for he must think I am dead."

With this the scout saddled his horse, put out his fire, and, taking his bearings started off in the direction of Silver Nugget, distant nearly a hundred miles from where he then was.

He rode on for several hours, and then finding good grass near a stream he crossed, decided to camp.

He did not fear the madman's following him, as he could not strike his trail until daylight, and then he would have some thirty miles start of him.

But, Cody well knew that he was in a dangerous country, as he might run upon a band of Indians at any time, while, besides, he had the road-agents to guard against.

Under such circumstances his feelings can be imagined, unarmed as he was.

But he had sought as secluded a camp as he could find in the darkness, off from the trail, and staked his horse out very near where he spread his blankets, while he did not light a camp-fire.

He slept fairly well, but was awake at dawn, and taking in his surroundings concluded to risk building a fire and cooking breakfast, which would be a light one, as he had very little more provisions.

"If I can't fight I can run away, for I've got the horse that can show his heels to any one of them," said the scout with some satisfaction at being able to run, at least.

So he had his breakfast, again searched through his trappings, hoping to find some ammunition, but without result, and then saddling up, rode on his way.

"I can hardly make Silver Nugget before late this afternoon, but that will do, for I guess I'd better go in after dark, as I do not wish to attract attention there now," he said, as he rode away.

It was while looking about for a camping place about noon, that Buffalo Bill suddenly saw coming toward him a horseman.

"An Indian chief, and if I move out of the pines he'll see me, sure.

"Ah! I had forgotten my lasso! I'll make that serve me, for I've got the dead-sure drop on that Injun," and leaping from his saddle, Buffalo Bill coiled his lasso, and crouching among some rocks, stood ready to launch it at his coming foe.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RENEGADE'S CONFESSION.

THE position of the scout was a good one, and fortunately, he had just ridden out of the trail to find a noon halting-place.

Hardly had he reached the shelter of some pines when he saw the horseman coming along the trail.

He had at once discovered that he was an Indian chief, and what he at first supposed was a companion, proved to be a horse in lead, and the animal carried a large pack.

Having found a good place among the rocks, Buffalo Bill had quickly made one end of his lariat fast to a stump, and the other was held coiled in his hand ready for use.

Nearer and nearer drew the Indian horseman, apparently dreading no danger on his trail to his village, and riding easily in his saddle, as though determined to take it quietly.

The trail would bring him within twenty feet of the scout, and his head would be a few feet lower than the rocks where Buffalo Bill was crouching, and well realizing that he must make no miss, without a weapon to defend himself with.

"He has been on a raid and secured lots of plunder, and those horses, for they are not Indian ponies," the scout muttered.

Another moment and the coil went whirling from the scout's hand; the noose settled over the head of the Indian; his frightened horse gave a bound, and the rider was dragged violently from his saddle to the ground.

There he lay, motionless while, having his rein looped around his wrist, it checked his horse, and the pack-animal, with his lead line around the leader's saddle-horn, was also unable to run off.

Down the decline scrambled the scout, and with a word to the horses, he approached the fallen rider.

A closer look at him, and he exclaimed: "This is no Indian, but a white man in red-skin garb!

"If he is a renegade, then I shall not be sorry if I have killed him—ah! he is not dead."

Down on his knees by the side of the man dropped the scout and placed his hand on his pulse.

"No, he is not dead, but how badly hurt I do not know. His horse gave such a spring I was sure his neck was broken.

"Well, he is certainly made up well, war-paint, costume, feathers and all, and he'd pass for a chief anywhere, without close inspection—but he is coming to his senses.

"Say, pard, are you badly hurt?"

The man's eyes slowly opened, and as he gazed at the face of the scout a strange look came into them.

He tried to move but the effort seemed to give him intense pain, and he began to breathe hard and in a labored way.

At last he said:

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"It was you who killed me?"

"I threw my lasso over you, but you are not dead yet."

"I soon will be, for I am hurt internally—it is a just retribution, for I deserve my fate.

"I see it now with Death's icy touch upon me."

"Who are you?"

"A renegade."

"A dweller in the Indian tribe?"

"Yes, for I have been a renegade for years—I am the chief known as Sky Eyes."

"Yes, I have heard of you, and fought your band several times."

"I knew that the Chief Sky Eyes was a white man, and a cruel foe to his own race."

"I know not why I should have been, save that it was the devil born in me; but, if a dying man can atone for his sins, I will gladly do so, and I believe that I can do much good now in my last few moments of life."

"You are right if it is in your power to atone for the past to do so, and I will gladly do all in my power to help you."

"What I do must be done quickly, for I feel that I have not long to live."

"I am suffering agony here, and my life seems slipping from me."

"Listen while I tell you that I am Sky Eyes, the renegade chief, and I have just left Road-Agent Rob and his band of outlaws."

"I went to see the road-agent captain to arrange with him a raid upon the settlements, for the chief Death Hand is anxious to retrieve his defeat of a few days ago."

"Road-Agent Rob sent his lieutenant to Death Hand, telling him to send a chief to him in a few days to arrange the raid upon Silver Nugget and Rawhide City, and I was the one that went to see him."

"All was arranged for Death Hand to send two bands of warriors, each six hun-

dred strong, to attack Silver Nugget and Rawhide City the same night."

"What night?"

"Just ten days from this."

"The Indians were to have the scalps and plunder, horses and cattle, and hurry back to their village, bearing the gold and silver to the outlaws, for Road-Agent Rob said that there were thousands of dollars in dust stored in Nugget City."

"And this diabolical plot you arranged with the outlaws?"

"I did, I am ashamed to say, as I feel, now, how guilty I am."

"Your dying confession, if you are dying, atones for your guilt, and you can pass away without this crime upon your soul, and feel that you have done, at the last, much good."

"Ten days from this, you say?"

"Yes."

"And you were going back now to report to Chief Death Hand?"

"Yes, and with yonder pack-horse laden down with presents for him, food, arms, ammunition, and other things."

"Some things, then, will come in quite handy for me," said the scout, with a significant smile as he glanced at the pack-horse, to turn quickly as the man cried out suddenly:

"My God! I had forgotten—Road-Agent Rob is to attack the west-bound coach to-day, which he said carried a large amount of money."

"Quick! Go and warn the coach, for you can head it off before it reaches what is known as Road-Agent Rock! God have mercy, for I suffer the torments of the damned," and the renegade clasped his hands over his left side, half-rose, and dropped back—dead!

CHAPTER XLIX.

TO HEAD OFF THE COACH.

"WELL! I've certainly got work on my hands—a dead man to bury, an uprising of redskins to thwart, a stage-coach to warn of an attack by road-agents, and a madman to hunt down."

"What time have I before the coach is due at Road-Agent Rock, I wonder?"

"Ha! there are shots now and I do not wish yet to be known."

So said Buffalo Bill, and suddenly dragging from the renegade his chief's war bonnet, and throwing a blanket about him, he leaped into his saddle and dashed away in the direction of the firing.

He was glad to know he was so much nearer to the Overland Trail than he had thought, for the firing was close at hand.

He had not taken time to look for ammunition for his weapons, had simply seized a revolver from the belt of the dead renegade, and hoped, by making a display of force at hand, to frighten off the road-agents.

His experienced eye told him as he reached the trail, that the coach had gone along on its way to Silver Nugget, even had the firing ahead not done so, and having been over the trail several times he knew that Road-Agent Rock was only a couple of hundred yards distant around the bend.

As he reached the trail a horse without bridle or saddle went by him in a run.

"Texas Jack's roan mare, ten to one on it!" he exclaimed, and as he dashed into view around the bend he saw the coach, the people defending themselves, and the road-agents that were riding hard to the aid of their comrades.

Loud his voice rung out, giving hope to the coach party and striking terror to the outlaws, who at once stampeded in flight, the mounted men wheeling quickly about, the dismounted men rushing with all speed back in the timber for their horses.

To a man they supposed that the coach had a military guard, which they had not expected to be along, and they knew that capture meant sure death to them.

So they spurred away at full speed, while Buffalo Bill, when he rode back into the trail, found that the coach had quickly driven on.

He was at first tempted to follow, but then he was not armed as he wished to be, and he did not know but that the outlaws, recovering from their scare, would return to look after their dead.

From the direction the outlaws had fled Buffalo Bill knew also that the coach was safe.

So he wisely decided to return and reap the fruits of his own victory over the renegade chief.

Back he went, the way he had come, and returning to the spot where he had lassoed the renegade, he found the body lying just as he had left it, the horse feeding near.

Several wolves, that had scented the body, were already skulking about, but fled at the return of the scout.

"I'd rather have a better place than this to see what my capture will pan out, and to bury the body, a place where I cannot be surprised."

"Maybe I'll find what I need here, and not have to go to Silver Nugget."

"But I would like to know what Texas Jack's roan mare is doing here, for I do not think I am mistaken."

So saying Buffalo Bill strapped the renegade's body upon his horse, and, taking the two animals in lead, rode away toward a distant hill that he knew would give him a view of all about him.

There was a stream at the base of the hill, good timber and grass, and he found a secure camping-place among the bowlders scattered about it.

His first duty was to unsaddle and stake the horses out to feed, and in a place so sheltered that they could not be seen, for a trail led along the base of the hill.

His next move was to dig a grave for the dead renegade, and finding a good spot behind a large rock, he set to work, rather glad to find that strapped to the pack-saddle was a spade, pick and shovel.

"I guess the renegade chief was going to do a little gold hunting on his own account," the scout muttered as he saw the tools.

In an hour's time he had dug a deep and narrow grave, and wrapping the body in a blanket, he placed it in it.

Then he packed in the earth hard, and when he had filled it in brought heavy stones and piled over it, so that the wolves would not tear it up.

Having done this he turned his attention to the pack-saddle.

CHAPTER L.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

WHEN a man is in deadly danger his thoughts flash with lightning rapidity through his brain.

If he is a man of nerve then it is that his presence of mind comes to his rescue.

If he is timid, the mortal terror he suffers reveals itself very quickly.

But Texas Jack had a nerve of iron, and when he heard the command to halt and up with his hands he was not thrown off his guard though surprised.

He was following the trail of the mysterious horseman, appearing like an Indian, giving a command like a general in action, and yet keeping out of sight as much as possible, but supposed by him to be Buffalo Bill.

Jack's first impression was that he had run upon the road-agents.

In such case he was too wise to attempt to wheel and fly, as he felt that he would be riddled with bullets.

He had no chance to retreat, for he could not see his foe.

He showed no sign of fear and called out in a careless way:

"It's your game, pard—I pass."

"Well, Jack, old pard, how are you?" came from among the rocks, over which Jack had seen a rifle pointing full at him.

"Buffalo Bill!" shouted Texas Jack, as he recognized the voice, which, when calling to him to halt had been disguised.

"Ay, ay, Jack, as large as life," and Buffalo Bill came out from behind the rocks.

Spurring toward him the two clasped hands warmly, Jack saying:

"The saints be praised, Bill, that you did not go over the cliff to which I tracked your horse, which I half passed."

"Ah! you tracked me well, Jack, but the horse went over as you say, though I did not."

"But who are you trailing now?"

"A certain Indian chief with the voice of Buffalo Bill."

"You recognized me then?"

"You bet I did, and as soon as I could feel the coach was safe I mounted my horse and came back to look you up."

"Good for you."

"I saw your horse dash by me, and felt sure I recognized him."

"But the coach went through safe?"

"Well, the treasure aboard did and there was lots of it, but the driver, Coffin Tom, was wounded, Lieutenant Knapp an army paymaster also, while the paymaster of the Overland and a soldier were killed."

"I knew they were having a hot time."

"And your coming saved us and nothing else."

"I am very glad."

"But since when have you been playing big Injun and why did you not come on and join us, for you stampeded the road-agents, and Road-Agent Rob was killed."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh yes; I fired as he held us up, and the team and coach went over him."

"When we drove on we took his body with the others of the coach, and I helped put him in Coffin Tom's box he has carried so long for his particular accommodation."

"Well, it is good news to hear that he is out of the way, but his lieutenant, known as Faro Phil, is a clever fellow and a better man, it is said, than was Road-Agent Rob himself."

"But, we'll get him, too, some day. We must rope them all in!"

"Now, tell me how it is that you are here, and you seem to have been on a raid from the looks of things."

"It's a long story, Jack, and you shall hear it after we have had some supper, for I'm hungry enough to eat coyote tenderloin, and was just about to cook supper when I saw you coming."

"I'm with you, Bill; but do you know I do not like the trail the road-agents took, for I saw which way they went."

"Which way was that?"

"On a course that would bring them across the trail from Silver Nugget to the fort."

"Ah, that is it, is it?"

"Yes, and they knew just what treasure the coach carried, and you may be sure found out that it was a false alarm of guards that scared them off."

"No doubt."

"They will therefore not give up the treasure, if their chief is the clever man you have heard he is."

"Then, you think he will head the coach party off on the trail to the fort?"

"That is just what I do think, Bill."

"But, there will be an escort sent from the fort."

"No, for the paymaster's letter never reached them, and they are to start from Silver Nugget to-night in buckboards."

"How many?"

"The paymaster and a soldier, Judge Willis, with his daughter's wedding outfit, and the drivers of the three buckboards, for it will take that many to carry the luggage."

"Jack, we'll have supper at once, then go and pick up the trail of the road-agents and be on hand to aid the paymaster and his party, for we will make those outlaws think there is no false alarm this time," said Buffalo Bill, earnestly.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SCOUTS COUNTERPLOT.

TEXAS JACK's horse was staked out to feed with Buffalo Bill's and the two animals of the dead renegade.

A fire was built and a good meal was soon cooking, for Buffalo Bill had found a "commissary department," as he expressed it, in the pack-saddle of the renegade.

Road-Agent Rob had certainly been most anxious to send his Indian friend, Chief Death Hand, a most tempting assortment of presents.

He had bought in Silver Nugget, through some of his band not known as road-agents, revolvers, rifles, knives, cooking utensils, blankets, supplies of flour, coffee, sugar, bacon, ham, and other edibles galore, while there was enough ammunition for the firearms to last during a small battle.

As quickly as he could, Buffalo Bill told of his second capture by the mad soldier-slayer, and how he was for a second time rescued by the muffled Unknown.

Of his deciding to go to Silver Nugget for supplies and ammunition he also made known, and ended with:

"Now, I was in great luck when the renegade, Chief Sky Eyes, came along, loaded down with supplies and ammunition, not to speak of the other things, and the two fine horses; but I'm doubly fortunate now, Jack, in having found you while you were looking for me."

"Ditto, pard, say I, in finding you; but I've enjoyed my dinner, supper, or whatever we may call it, and am ready for the trail, for we have no more of daylight than we need," responded Jack.

The horses were brought up and the contents of the pack-saddle equally distributed between the two horses of the renegade.

Then the scout mounted, and each with a horse in lead, started on the trail.

They decided it best to avoid the scene of the hold-up where the party sent out from Silver Nugget to bury the dead might be, and to cut straight across country to where the road-agents' trail would be found in their retreat.

Doing this also saved them an hour of time.

"It is just as I thought," said Texas Jack, as they came to a fresh trail, made by a dozen horses at least.

"They decided to strike the party on the trail from Silver Nugget to the fort as soon as they had been driven off without raiding the coach," said Texas Jack.

"That is just it, and having discovered that they had been frightened off by one man they got revengeful and still determined to yet gobble the paymaster and Miss Sophie's wedding outfit."

"Yes, for they knew that no guard was expected from the fort, and felt sure that Captain Knapp and Judge Willis would press right on in buckboards, rather than delay several days in Silver Nugget for an escort."

"I tell you Bill, those road-agents have got some spy among those who handle the mails and thus get posted upon what is going on, and more, kept back the paymaster's letter asking for an escort."

"You are about right, Jack."

"But now about these fellows?"

"Well?"

"There are a dozen of them at least?"

"Just about, eleven or twelve, but they have not got Road-Agent Rob to lead them."

"No, but they have Faro Phil, now their captain, and even more dangerous."

"True; he showed up well in the fight."

"There are in the other party the paymaster, one soldier, the father of Miss Willis and the drivers of two, or three, say, buckboards."

"Yes, six call them!"

"And we are two, but will count for more, as we will surprise them."

"Yes; but where do you think they will strike the Fort Vail trail?"

"Why, at the best place in the world for an ambushade, at the Point of Rocks."

"It is the very place."

"Yes, and the course of this trail heads for that place."

"In fact, Jack, if they do not branch off ahead here a couple of miles, to take the lower valley trail and hit the party nearer the fort, they cannot come upon them at any other spot than the Point of Rocks."

"That's so."

"We will soon know when we get to the Two Valleys, and it will just about be light enough for us to see which trail they took."

"I'll bet on the Point of Rocks, for the trail winds around there for a mile, with the cliff on one side, the river on the other, and not room enough to turn a buckboard."

"You are right, and as they will push through by night the party will not see the trail of the road-agents."

Two Valleys was soon reached, and the trail of the outlaws led to the Point of Rocks.

"Now, Jack, our plan is to ride for the Fort Vale trail, and try and get there in time to head the party off and spring a surprise upon the road agents."

"If not in time, we must try and be in at

the death," said Buffalo Bill, and the two counterplotters rode hurriedly on in the gathering gloom.

CHAPTER LII.

THE NIGHT TRAIL.

THE coach, after Texas Jack had gone on the back trail, rolled on rapidly toward Silver Nugget.

Though his wound pained him considerably it did not interfere with Coffin Tom's driving, and he sent his team of six horses along at a lively pace.

The road between Rawhide City and Silver Nugget was a long one, but only had two relays for a change of horses, and these were just ten miles out from each settlement.

As the horses had had two halts, Coffin Tom did not spare them, knowing that they would soon get to the relay nearest to Nugget City, and he brought them to their resting place only half an hour behind time.

From there on he made the fresh teams travel fast, anxious to come into Nugget on time in spite of the hold up on the way.

When he blew his stage horn to announce his coming, he was to the minute on time, but his horses were covered with foam and panting like dogs.

His arrival created a sensation, for the coach was scarred up with bullets, and in addition to the dead paymaster and soldier, Coffin Tom's box had an occupant—none other than Road-Agent Rob.

He had kept his pledge and brought in the road-agent captain in his coffin!

But, Coffin Tom was not boastful. He had little to say more than that they had been held up, but got through. He turned the body of the dead Overland paymaster and his strong box over to the agent of the line at Silver Nugget.

The body of the dead soldier was enveloped in a blanket, to be carried to the fort for burial.

Both Judge Willis and Captain Knapp seemed disappointed to learn that there was no escort from the fort there for them, as they had hoped there would be, but after talking with the agent of the Overland Line decided that they would push right on and go through by night, as they could get some miles on their way before dark, and the moon would light their way for some hours, as it would not set before eleven o'clock.

The agent told them that he could give them three good drivers who knew the way, able horses and stout buckboards, and they could reach the fort to breakfast the next morning, while it would be safe traveling by night, as no Indians would attack them after dark, and as their going would not be suspected until they started no outlaws could get wind of it to molest them.

So it was decided to have an early supper, load the luggage on the buckboards and start.

The agent kept his word and did furnish good teams, strong buckboards and fine drivers, and until the party drove out of the coach stables no one, save those interested, knew of the intended night ride, and Coffin Tom, who had secured a pair of crutches, and gone to see them start, said:

"I tell you, gents, you have gotten ahead of them as would harm you if yer had time."

"I know these men as drives, and they is first class, you bet, only a little superstitious about carrying a dead body along; but then it's best to take the poor soldier to the fort to be buried with honors."

"Good-by and good luck to you!"

The judge and the captain rode together in the rear buckboard, the latter driving, while two of the agent's men led in the first vehicle, the third driver and the soldiers occupying the second, and all were thoroughly armed.

When night fell the party were miles away from Silver Nugget, and the teams were traveling well.

The judge and the captain were congenial companions and chatted pleasantly together as they drove along.

An hour after darkness fell the drivers in the leading buckboard halted on the banks of a small stream to water and rest their horses, and building a fire they made a cup

of coffee all round and ate a cold snack while the animals were feeding.

After an hour's rest they hitched up and continued their way again, the men in the lead showing as before, that they were good guides, keeping up the same pace when the moon in its first quarter went down and left the trail a dark and dangerous one.

"We will make one more halt, after we pass the Point of Rocks a few miles, and then push on through from there," said one of the men, and the horses were kept steadily at it, though often had to go slow when the trail was rough and dangerous.

The Point of Rocks was passed, and along the trail under the cliff the buckboards had to go cautiously.

Suddenly out of the darkness ahead came a loud command:

"Halt there all of you!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FLIGHT.

"FORTUNATELY, Jack, I brought my lantern along," said Buffalo Bill, as the two scouts came to the trail between Fort Vale and Silver Nugget.

Dismounting from his horse the scout took from one of the pack-animals the lantern which he had brought from the mad-man's cavern.

Lighting it, he began to look about on the ground, and was not long in discovering what he wished, for he called out:

"They have passed, Jack, for here are the tracks of the buckboards and made but a short while ago."

"We must ride for it then, Bill, or they will get to the Point of Rocks ahead of us," responded Texas Jack.

Putting out the lantern Buffalo Bill leaped into his saddle and the two pushed on at a gallop.

After a hard ride they came to the crossing of the stream and the dark cliffs loomed up before them.

"Halt! I hear the wheels," said Buffalo Bill, and hardly had the words left his lips when loud voices were heard ahead and shots followed.

"They are in for it."

"Come, Jack!" cried Buffalo Bill; and both scouts let go the lead line of the pack-horses and dashed on, each giving his wild and ringing war-cry.

"Confound these Irons about my wrists, they hamper me," cried Buffalo Bill, while Texas Jack shouted:

"Hold them at bay, Captain Knapp, for Buffalo Bill and his scouts are coming."

A cheer greeted these words from some one, and then came the command:

"Charge them, men!"

"There are only two men coming yonder, as your ears will tell you!"

A cheer followed this from their leader, and the road-agents began to run upon the buckboards and their defenders, when, suddenly, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack dashed up and that there was but two was revealed by the flashes of the revolvers and rifles.

"Bravo, Texas Jack! And, hurrah! it is you, my gallant Buffalo Bill," cried Captain Knapp, as he crouched behind a buckboard and was using his revolvers.

"They outnumbered us greatly, gentlemen, and we have lost two of our men, but we won't give up the fight," cried Judge Willis, standing at bay by another buckboard, while the soldier and the remaining driver were also fighting from a point of vantage near at hand.

"Come on! Faro Phil, with your cut-throats, and share the fate of Road-Agent Rob!" cried Buffalo Bill, in his deep commanding tones.

The road-agents halted in their advance, while one shouted:

"Buffalo Bill is there, for I know his voice."

But their leader called out:

"Cowards! do you fear one man? Follow me!"

But, suddenly, their advance was again checked, as back on the trail rung, clear, loud and inspiring, the notes of a bugle.

Hardly had the signal ceased when the hoofs of running horses rattled back echoes from the cliff, and a voice shouted:

"Help is near, men! Clear the trail for the cavalry!"

There was no call, now, for the road-agents to charge, and their leader fled with the rest in wild terror, back to where they had left their horses.

Hastily they threw themselves into their saddles, all but three who had fallen, and sprung away at their utmost speed to reach the end of the narrow trail, where they could find the open country on which to hide from their pursuers.

Behind them they heard the bugle notes now and then, but the clatter of the hoofs of their horses drowned all other sounds, and reaching at last the break in the cliff they longed for, they wheeled into it and rode like the wind through the canyon to seek shelter in the hills beyond, wild with rage at being driven from their game in the very moment of success.

But had they halted to listen, their long experienced ears would have told them that there were but three horses in pursuit and as many riders, and one of these, as he rode along, would put his hands to his mouth and most cleverly imitate the notes of a bugle sounding the charge!

When these three horsemen reached the canyon they halted and listened attentively for some minutes to the sound of retreating hoofs, until they died away in the distance, and then Buffalo Bill, who was one of the three, said:

"There is nothing more to fear from those men this night, so we'll go back and see what damage was done; and you, pard, must tell us how you came to the rescue like a squadron of cavalry, for Jack and myself are most anxious to know."

CHAPTER LIV.

PLAYING A LONE HAND.

WHEN Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack reached the scene of the conflict, they took in the situation, like the skillful fighters they were.

They saw that the outlaws had halted the party at the narrowest part of the trail, but, fortunately, just where it gave them the shelter of a few large pines and some bowlders.

Beyond this position the outlaws had to advance, where there was no shelter for them.

But, it was evident that the road-agents had never taken resistance into consideration, and expected a quick surrender upon demand.

The scouts found the captain, judge, and the other two of the party whom they saw, in places of advantage and comparative safety, standing bravely at bay against their assailants, who had been taken aback at the resistance offered.

The command of the outlaw leader to halt had been met by a fire from the two men in the leading buckboard, who were plucky fellows, and one of the road-agents fell under their shots.

But, the answering fire brought both men down, and one of the buckboard horses, while the captain called out all to spring to shelter and fight it out with their foes, whoever they were.

"We are Road-Agent Rob's band, and a dozen against you, so surrender if you value your lives," cried the leader of the outlaws.

The response was a volley of shots from the halted party.

Captain Knapp, as well as those with him, soon realized that they would be overrun, when the war-cries of the coming scouts gave them renewed courage and up dashed Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack.

Still the outlaws greatly outnumbered them; and, as retreat was impossible, they could rain upon them volleys from their rifles that nothing could withstand, it seemed.

Then it was, that, in the moment when all hung in the balance, the notes of the bugle were heard, followed by the clattering hoofs and the call as from an officer that help was at hand.

It was a surprise to Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack when they heard the call, but a greater one to see of what the supposed "cavalry" consisted.

They saw one horseman, with his hands to his mouth, imitating the notes of a

bugle, and following him, and being led, their own and a third pack-horse!

"Great Scott! It's Old Buckskin Joe!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"How on earth did he get here?" queried Texas Jack.

They had leaped for their horses quickly, and while Old Buckskin let go his led animals, the two pards joined him in the chase at his call:

"Come, pards, we must keep up the show of pursuing with cavalry."

Away the three dashed to halt at the canyon and then retrace their way.

Arriving at the scene of the fight they found a fire built, and by its light Judge Willis was dressing a slight wound received by the gallant paymaster, while the soldier and remaining driver had laid their dead comrades out and were getting out blankets to put about their forms, which they were to carry on with them as they were doing with the cold and stark body of the soldier whom Coffin Tom had said the drivers thought it bad luck to have along.

One of the buckboard horses had been killed, and two more were slightly wounded, but not sufficiently severe to prevent their going on with their loads.

"You can have one of my horses to hitch in," said Buffalo Bill as he rode up with Texas Jack and Old Buckskin and he addressed the buckboard driver, who said in response:

"We owe it to you and your pard, Mr. Cody, that we can go on at all for we were in bad shape when you came up.

"But what shall we do with the dead outlaws, for there are three of them?"

"Better carry them along in spite of the extra weight, for it won't do to delay here to bury them. You can push through now and not spare the horses, though I expect no further trouble for you," and Buffalo Bill turned, as Captain Knapp came up with Judge Willis.

Both grasped his hand warmly, and thanked him for his valuable services, while Texas Jack said:

"It was Buffalo Bill who saved us in the other attack, captain. He was wearing borrowed plumage then, yet would not give us a closer look at him, for he was not yet ready to show up."

"But, here is our real preserver to-night, gentlemen—Joseph Buck, known to his pards as Old Buckskin. He got in his fine work just in time. He can out-bugle the man that made the first bugle," said Buffalo Bill, while Old Buckskin remarked in his modest way:

"I was fortunate to be near by."

CHAPTER LV.

THE UNERRING TRAILER.

THE delay of the party was not longer than was necessary to hitch one of Buffalo Bill's pack-horses in the place of the animal that had been killed, and to envelop the forms of the dead in blankets and place them in the different buckboards, the slain outlaws as well as the others as they could be stowed away.

Captain Knapp had expected Buffalo Bill and his two companions to go with them to the fort, but the chief of scouts said that it was impossible for them to do so just then, and for him to kindly report to Colonel Kent that Texas Jack and Old Buckskin had accomplished half of their mission in finding him, while the three hoped to be able to give the colonel some valuable information upon their return.

The driver from Silver Nugget went in the leading buckboard as guide, the soldier drove the second one, and the judge now drove the third one, with Captain Knapp riding with him.

Arriving at the canyon the scouts bade them good-night and watched them drive on their way, confident that they would have no more trouble, Buffalo Bill having explained to them that the outlaws would have to ride twenty miles around to another point where they could attack them, and that would be when they were within an hour's drive of the fort, unless they came back after them through the canyon.

In that case they would run against a barrier, with them, him, and comrades behind it.

Thus assured, they drove on with no fear of further danger, and the trio of scouts continued on their way through the canyon.

Passing out of the other end they listened attentively for some time, and convinced that the outlaws were miles away and still running, they went to a good camping-place Old Buckskin knew of near by, and staking out their horses were soon fast asleep, for they were all very tired.

The sun was up when they awoke, but they had had a good long sleep, their horses were well rested, and were eating readily of the juicy grass near, and one and all felt ready for the work before them.

A fire was built and breakfast was cooking, they having the supplies of Old Buckskin to draw on, as well as those of the renegade.

"Now we are just in clover, pards, say I," averred Buffalo Bill, and he added:

"It is now in order to know how you got there last night, old man, and in the very nick of time, as you have a way of doing, when we thought you nearly a hundred miles away at the rendezvous, where Texas Jack told me he was to meet you?"

"Well, Chief Cody, the story is soon told. I went to the tree where the unknown man was tied, took the trail on from there to the cliff, and looking about there discovered where some one had gone on foot down the steep mountain-side.

"My glass showed me that they must have gone down to a canyon near the base of the mountain, so I rode around the ridge until I could get to the valley with my horses, and keeping the position of the canyon in sight, I staked my horses out, and went up on foot.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Cody, what I found, for I saw traces of your presence in that cave, and tracks I saw in the valley convinced me that they had been made by your horse, the one the madman had ridden, as I was told by Colonel Kent, when the giant first captured you and went to warn the Indians of the soldiers' advance on their village."

"You were right, Pard Buck; and let me say just here that you can give lessons to any man I know in trailing and reading border signs."

"Thank you; but I have had experience enough to know my business well, so should do so, Mr. Cody."

"But go on with your story, please."

"There is not much more to tell, for I followed your trail, hoping to find you, and go back with you to the rendezvous with Texas Jack.

"I saw where you had killed some one on the trail, and it looked to me as if you had used your lasso."

"Right you are, old man."

"I tracked you from there to the Overland trail, when you turned back to the place where you lassoed some one, and from there I followed your trail to the spot where you buried him."

"Another trail passed here, joined yours and then the tracks of four horses led from there together."

"I have made the hoof-tracks of the horses of our scouts' band a study, and I felt convinced that the one who had joined you was Texas Jack."

"So I pushed on and finding that you had turned into the trail leading to the fort, I took it leisurely, supposing that you had gone on there."

"Then it struck me that you might at once send some one to the cliff after me, so instead of camping I pushed rapidly on and was fortunate enough to get to the fight at the Point of Rocks in time to see the outlaws stampeded."

"Yes, to stampede them," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LVI.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

HAVING heard Old Buckskin's simply told narrative, of how he had unerringly tracked the Mad Giant to his lair, and read from the signs there that Buffalo Bill had escaped, and just as unerringly tracked him to the Point of Rocks, the chief of scouts said:

"Well, old man, they must all take a back seat when you strike a trail."

"That's so!" added Texas Jack. "You are the king-pin of trailers, Buck!"

"But tell me, did you see no sign of the mad-man slayer at the cave?"

"Signs in plenty, but not the man."

"He had not returned then from wherever he went."

"No one was there."

"Well, he started off, he told me, to go to the Indian village, confident that I could not escape. And, right he was, for if I had not been aided by the same muffled being who before rescued me, you would have found me there, old man."

"You see on my wrists and on this ankle, that I was held secure. I wish I could get rid of these irons, though I see no chance to do so until I get to the fort."

"No, you will have to wait until then, though I can snap the irons so that they will not chafe the flesh," said Old Buckskin and this he at once did.

Then Buffalo Bill continued:

"Now, my idea is that we should go to the cavern, see if the mad soldier-slayer is there, and if so, capture him if we can, and if not he will have to be killed, for he is too dangerous a man to run loose any longer, though I hate to shoot a man whose mind is crazed."

"As I do, but, he is as dangerous as a mad dog."

"Yes, take him alive if we can, but kill if we must," asserted Texas Jack.

"Well, should he not be there, I have a scheme on hand, and it is this:

"The renegade Sky Eyes, told me enough to enable me to carry out a plot I have formed."

"You see that my beard has grown considerably in the past two weeks. Well, I will cut off the ends of my mustache and imperial to match; then I will put on the suit I took from one of those dead road-agents, hat, boots and all. I can fix my hair up on my head so that no one will know it is long."

"A little paint and dirt, a changed expression on my face and stoop in the shoulders, will disguise me completely. Then, with the renegade chief's two horses, I will strike out for the Indian village, carrying the presents Road-Agent Rob sent to old Death Hand."

"This will make me solid with chief Death Hand, as coming from Road-Agent Rob, and I will tell him that Sky Eyes was killed by Buffalo Bill, so that I was sent to plan with the great chief just how he was to send his two columns of braves to attack Rawhide City settlement and Silver Nugget, only I will suggest that the outlaw chief thinks he had better make a clean sweep of both places by sending a thousand warriors in each column, and while a small band retreats from each settlement with the captured horses, cattle and plunder, the two main forces will unite and march on to the fort to surprise it."

"A splendid plot, Mr. Cody."

"None finer; only you had better let me be the one to go to the Indian village," suggested Texas Jack.

"No; I am the one who should go, for I speak their language well," remarked Old Buckskin.

"I chatter their lingo to a slight degree myself, old man, and so I'll be the one that goes."

"You see, I've got it all down fine, and I wish to find out if there are any captives there, and all I can about the village and its advances, for my plan is to have the two bands ambushed by a few soldiers, but for the cavalry to make a quick ride to the village, in the absence of their army of braves, and attack it, so that the three blows struck will make the red-skins quiet for a long time in these parts."

"It will, indeed; but we must not lose sight of the fact, Mr. Cody, that we have got to solve the mystery of that poor man tied to the tree, as to whether it was Duke Dashwood or not," said Old Buckskin.

"No; we must solve that, and discover whether he was killed, and who was his murderer, if killed he was."

"Also, I desire to find out who my unknown rescuer was. In fact, in making that discovery, in finding out Mr. Dashwood's fate, hunting down the Mad Nemesis, my going into the Indian village, and trapping

old Death Hand and his people, we have got plenty of work laid out for us.

"So we'll saddle up and start at once for the cave of the madman, and it will be a good retreat for you two while I am visiting my red brothers."

With this the three scouts at once began to prepare for the work before them.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE WORK BEGUN.

THE packs were well distributed between the remaining horses of the renegade, and the animal which Old Buckskin had carried with him, and then the three scouts set off on what was the gamest trail of their lives, for Buffalo Bill was to invade the Indian village while his two comrades were to beard the lion in his den, so to speak, as they were to hunt down the mad soldier-slayer.

They camped late at night, and within easy distance of the madman's cave, and Buffalo Bill and Old Buckskin went on foot after supper to reconnoiter in the darkness.

They reached the canyon, and all was dark at the cave, but remembering the trap-guns set by the madman Buffalo Bill said:

"We'll not investigate further to-night; but I do not believe he is here."

So they returned to their camp and remained until just before dawn, when they went again to the canyon, and leaving their horses a couple of hundred yards away, they crept up and took position in front of the retreat.

Then they waited until dawn broke.

But the madman did not appear.

When the sun rose and sent its rays into the cave they saw that it was unoccupied, or at least Buffalo Bill said:

"The gun-traps are set, but I think he is not there."

Convinced that the madman was away, Buffalo Bill, understanding just how the trap was set said:

"I will go in and break the connection, for by picking up a lariat, or gun, bear robe even, or touching something with your foot, you set off the muskets."

So he went into the cave, cautiously stepped among the lines and all set to explode the guns, and then removed them so as to prevent their firing.

"Come in, pards, for all is safe now," he said and the other two entered.

"Now your first duty must be to find a hiding-place for your horses, and one of you will have to see to them night and morning, the other being on watch here constantly."

"Knowing the man as I do, I would advise that one of you be on watch constantly day and night, for he will slip upon you like a mountain lion at any time."

"Try and lariat him, and only when necessary kill him."

"He has been here since I left, and he has doubtless gone off on my trail, so you may expect him back at any time."

"Now make me up for a fierce desperado, and I'll go on my visit to my friend Death Hand."

With a great deal of ingenuity Buffalo Bill was "made up," until his two comrades had to admit that they would never suspect him of being the handsome chief of scouts.

His elegant mustache and imperial, distinguishing marks of the man, were cut quite short, to correspond with the beard's growth of two weeks, and charcoal was rubbed over the face to give it a neglected look.

Two flat pebbles, about the size of a silver dollar, were given him by Old Buckskin to put in each cheek, which changed the contour of his face, and made his voice seem muffled.

His long hair had been twisted up aside his head and fastened there, his brows had been made far heavier by being charcoaled, the handcuffs had been wrapped around with pieces of bright-red flannel, and the manacle upon one ankle had been hidden under the large boots taken from one of the dead renegades.

A red-flannel shirt, the clothing of the dead renegade and a black slouch hat, with a pad, between the shoulders and a stoop completed the disguise and Buffalo Bill was certainly a metamorphosed man in appearance.

The saddle given the dead renegade by Road-Agent Rob was then put upon the chief of scouts' horse, the pack-saddle upon the other and Buffalo Bill was ready for his most desperate venture.

He shook hands with his comrades then, mounted and rode away.

"If that was any other man that was going on that trail I would say that he was a fool, or wanted to commit suicide," said Old Buckskin as the chief rode away.

"And yet you would do the same, or I."

"That's so; only the chief seems to be well suited to play desperate games, and he's just the man to have his fun with the red-skins while deceiving them."

"You bet he will, for he'll see the funny side of everything that turns up, no matter what his danger is; but does he bear the slightest resemblance to the handsome Buffalo Bill?"

"Indeed, he does not."

"Well, all we can do now is to wish him good luck, and then take care of ourselves, for from all accounts that madman is no slouch, and it will be like a grizzly bear coming home and finding us in his den, when he drops in I guess."

"Yes, and we must be ready for him, but remember spare his life if it is possible to do so, for I feel a sympathy for a man whose mind is gone, for perhaps some great shock and grief, some cruel wrong maddened him," and Old Buckskin's face looked the sorrow that he felt.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE FORT.

THE anxiety at the fort increased as those who were in the secret knew that Texas Jack and Old Buckskin had made the last effort to try and find the missing chief of scouts, and also to solve the mystery hanging over Duke Dashwood.

The colonel, and his two brother officers next in rank to him, constantly met and talked over the matter, and hoped that Texas Jack and Old Buckskin would find some clue to the two missing men.

It was on the morning of the third day since the departure of the two scouts on their mission, one to the cliff, the other to the two settlements, that Lieutenant Colonel Grayson met Major Roy as the latter came out of his quarters on his way to visit Colonel Kent.

"Going to headquarters, major?"

"Yes, are you?"

"I am, so we will go along together, and I do hope the colonel has some news."

"So do I—but the sentinel is signaling the approach of some one to the fort."

They soon reached headquarters, and Colonel Kent welcomed them in his courteous way and said:

"My orderly has just reported that there are three vehicles in sight coming up the trail, and I am anxious to know who they bring, as we are expecting no one."

They did not have to wait long, as there drove into the fort and up to headquarters three buckboards.

The horses had been driven hard, and each buckboard carried a ghastly load in addition to its drivers.

"Judge Willis as sure as I live!" said Colonel Grayson, while the major said:

"And my old friend, Paymaster Knapp."

"There has been trouble there, surely."

"There certainly has, gentlemen," Colonel Kent remarked, and added:

"Captain Knapp should have written me for an escort, and not attempted to come through alone."

"And I expected a letter from the judge, telling me when he was coming," Lieutenant Colonel Grayson added.

The buckboards had now drawn up before Colonel Kent's headquarters, and the three officers went out to meet the arrivals.

The first buckboard was driven by a typical borderman, the second by a soldier, and the third contained Captain Knapp and Judge Willis, but Colonel Kent said reproachfully:

"You should have notified us, of your coming, gentlemen."

"I wrote two letters to you, colonel," said Captain Knapp.

"And I wrote both you, Grayson, and

my daughter Sophie, to expect me several days ago at your nearest Overland coach point."

"The letters were never received, and there has been underhand work in this; but you appear to have been very well able to take care of yourselves, gentlemen, without our escort, from the looks of things," and the colonel pointed to the bodies, for some soldiers had already taken the dead outlaws off the vehicles and laid them to one side, and, under the direction of the soldier who had just arrived, were placing his comrade and the drivers in another group.

"Yes, we were attacked twice, and owe it to Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack and our elderly scout that we are here at all," said Captain Knapp.

"Buffalo Bill?"

"What? have you seen him?" cried Colonel Kent.

"And he is alive?" added Colonel Grayson.

"Very much alive, I should say, Grayson."

"Oh, yes, we have seen him, and so have the band of Road-Agent Rob," Judge Willis remarked, while Captain Knapp added:

"I am ready to make my report, Colonel Kent, but let me relieve your mind at once by saying that I got through without the loss of a dollar, thanks to your chief of scouts and two of his comrades, and they saved a large sum of money for the Overland Company too, though their paymaster was killed in the first attack."

"The judge also saved the valuable baggage he has brought along, sir, but one of my men was killed, and we lost two of the drivers with us, and there were some wounds received also."

"Yes, Colonel Kent, Captain Knapp himself was twice wounded, and proved himself a hero, while I cannot say too much in favor of your splendid scouts—but say, Grayson, how are my girls, and let me ask if it is too late for breakfast?"

Colonel Grayson took the hint and hurried his father-in-law off to his quarters, while Captain Knapp went in with Colonel Kent to get some breakfast, and while waiting told the colonel and Major Roy the whole story of the journey from Rawhide City, and how Buffalo Bill had stampeded the outlaws at the first attack, and afterward, aided by Texas Jack and Old Buckskin, he had again saved them, the Government money and the valuable baggage carried by the judge.

CHAPTER LIX.

AFFAIRS AT FORT VALE.

THE arrival of the buckboards at the fort created a decided sensation.

The death of the soldier was deeply deplored and regret felt for the drivers, while all were glad to know that the outlaws had been hit so hard at each attack.

That Road Agent Rob had been killed was a subject of general congratulation, and many hoped that the blow against his men would break up the band.

The whole story was soon known to all, from the colonel down and the captain, judge and the soldiers were looked upon as heroes after what they had passed through.

That Buffalo Bill had turned up again was cause for universal rejoicing, and yet the soldiers and scouts could not understand why he had disappeared so mysteriously, and also the reason he had not escorted the buckboard party to the fort.

The order soon came from the colonel to bury the dead soldiers and drivers with military honors, and at this the Silver Nugget man who had escaped was much pleased, for he knew the compliment such a burial was to him.

The whole fort turned out to the funeral, and the scene was an impressive one.

The dead outlaws were buried apart, and, it is needless to say, without funeral honors.

Most warmly had the judge been welcomed by his daughters, Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Grayson and Miss Sophie, and Lieutenant Walter Wayne, who was soon to claim the beautiful young daughter of the judge, was more than delighted with the gifts purchased for his bride; and, happy in saving them from the outlaws, he at once started a purse for the remaining buckboard driver and Coffin Tom, giving a month's pay as his offering.

Judge Willis had also responded most liberally, and Colonel Kent, Major Roy and others, until the man was made happy over his share of the purse, and started back for Silver Nugget with a splendid opinion of Fort Vale and its garrison, carrying with him the money for Coffin Sam also, as a salve for his wound.

He expressed himself as wholly competent to drive his team and lead the other two, and from the way he started off bright and early one morning there seemed no doubt but that he could do so, and, as he said, with a fair prospect of reaching Silver Nugget before nightfall, for he would go through light and keep the horses at a rush.

When the baggage brought by Judge Willis was opened for inspection, many thought it was worth a desperate fight to save, while all knew that, with the *trousseau* and the presents, the whole value was not far from twenty thousand dollars, certainly a rich haul for the road-agents.

That the paymaster had gotten through with his treasure meant a great deal to all in the garrison, and taken altogether there were rumors that when Buffalo Bill and his two companions did return to the fort they should receive a grand ovation, due their heroism.

But those that were best posted, the ranking officers, were most anxious regarding the return of the scouts.

Buffalo Bill had sent no other word by Captain Knapp, than to tell him he had been again a prisoner to his old foe, but would explain all when he returned to the fort.

He had also hinted that he had important information for him that might require the sending out of a large force.

Texas Jack had sent word only that he had found Buffalo Bill, but was still busy on the other trail, which the colonel would understand, and had gathered some valuable information regarding the one he was seeking.

Old Buckskin had sent no word, but Captain Knapp remembered to having heard him say that he had been to the rendezvous appointed with Texas Jack, and then had followed a trail which brought him to the scene of the outlaws' attack in time to be of service.

This was all that Colonel Kent could glean about the three scouts from the captain, judge and the soldier, for he had sent for the latter hoping he might have learned something which the others had not.

But it was all in vain.

He could glean no more than that the three scouts were busy on some trail they could not send him a report of, and he must await their return to the fort, and he prepared to act upon what information they might bring in.

Thus stood matters at Fort Vale while Buffalo Bill and his two comrades were off on the deadliest trail of their lives.

CHAPTER LX.

BUFFALO BILL'S GAMEST TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL rode away on his mission fully conscious of all it meant, and the peril his every minute would be to him until he was safe again among his comrades.

His seat in the saddle, after he rode out of the canyon, was not that of the splendid horseman he is, for he rode along with a slouchy air in keeping with his disguise.

He knew not, as he neared the mountains, where the Indian village was located, what eye might be upon him.

He had neglected nothing, and knowing that the outlaws carried a red flag with a skull and crossbones in white on it, for he had found one on each dead road-agent, he had brought a couple along.

He had never known for sure that the road-agents were friendly with the Indians, though he had suspected it, and as they were they must know the flag of Road-Agent Rob and his men.

So Buffalo Bill carried one of the red flags on a pole above him as he rode along, as a means of protection should some red-skin sight him and wish to ambush him.

It was late in the afternoon as he climbed the high range, upon the summit of which

was the valley where the Indian village was located.

He knew pretty well where to find the village, having scouted near it before, and he saw by the trails he came upon that he could not be far away.

He also saw columns of smoke along the summit of the range, and soon after, glancing behind him to observe the grand view, for the scout is an enthusiastic admirer of nature, he beheld following upon his trail a score of mounted warriors.

He did not flinch, but he knew his approach had long been seen, and that they had quietly fallen in behind him.

Glancing ahead he saw other braves appear in view.

"I'm in for it now," he said as he rode on to meet those who had appeared in the trail ahead of him.

There are some of the Indian tongues that Buffalo Bill is an expert in, but he felt that it was not a great success in the language of the tribe he was then visiting, and he muttered:

"If they were Sioux, Cheyennes or Pawnees, I could tell them something they did not know; but I guess I'm badly off on Ute gammon."

"Still, with what I do know, with what they understand of English, and some they may have learned of Sioux or Pawnee, and ringing in the sign language as a side issue, I guess I'll get along pretty well," said the scout, as he rode forward.

Then as he drew near the group of redskins, never flinching at the hostile demonstration of some of them, he said that which is a correct salutation of any red-skin:

"*How come!*"

They responded by grunts, and the scout sprung what he called his "Pigeon Ute" upon them, and was pleased to see that it passed muster, for he was told that the great chief, Death Hand, was at the big medicine tepee, and to follow them.

He did so, and managed to get quite friendly with the young chief of the party as he rode along, paying to him the doubtful compliment of saying:

"The chief Red Feather speaks English as well as I do Ute."

"The pale-face is welcome, for the warriors of the Red Death Flag are the friends of my people."

"The great chief Death Hand will be pleased to see his white brother."

"The pleasure will be all his own," returned the scout, with a sly twinkle of the eye, as he knew the young chief did not master the satire of his words.

Entering the village Buffalo Bill recognized how well it was located for defense, and retreat if necessary, through the passes beyond.

He saw, too, that such a large village could readily throw a couple of thousand warriors in the field, and yet have a respectable force to defend their home and families.

Continuing on through the village with the young chief Red Feather, and a score of braves as an escort, Buffalo Bill soon found himself in the presence of the great chief Death Hand, who would have given that same deadly hand that had gained him his name, to have known that he had then in his power the famous scout whose name was a terror to his people.

The great chief heard what the Red Feather had to say, and welcomed his visitor with delight.

The scout, assuming his slouching gait when he dismounted, and with a peculiar drawl in his voice, told the chief that his brother of the Red Death Flag, meaning Road-Agent Rob, then in his grave, which he wisely forbore to mention, had sent him to tell him the sad news of the chief Sky Eyes's death at the hands of Buffalo Bill.

The great chief gave a savage yell at this, for he had leaned much upon his white ally as an *aide-de-camp*.

Telling the story the scout went on to say that Road-agent Rob had been hit some hard blows of late, and was thirsting for revenge, and if he could get Death Hand to aid him, they could get hundreds of horses, cattle and booty and scalps galore.

Waxing enthusiastic Buffalo Bill told just how it all could be done, by a column of red braves attacking the two settlements, and then sending off their booty and stock, un-

der a few of the young men, to drive them to their village, the main force could retreat by the fort, surprise it and strike a blow that would long be remembered by the whites.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN THE LIONS' DEN.

THE great chief listened with deepest interest to all that the disguised scout had to say.

It was a bait that he eagerly grabbed at, this promise of scalps, hundreds of horses and cattle, and no end to booty, of household effects, blankets, weapons and ammunition, not to speak of the supplies of provisions from the stores.

Winter was not very far off, and he could in one grand raid, stock his village with supplies that would last them until the grass grew green again.

Nor was this all, for he had been very sore over their defeat by the soldiers.

He hated the soldiers and white settlers with a bitterness that was fiendish, yet loved the outlaws because they made war upon them.

He regarded the Mormons most kindly because the Government was watching them, and then he was a most dangerous element to the peace of the border, backed as he was by his many braves, for his people felt as he did.

Until they had been dealt a stunning blow the army officers on the frontier all knew Death Hand and his tribe would be a very dangerous foe to face, and hard to manage, and therefore every effort was made to catch them napping and hit them hard, to convince them that Uncle Sam would do all possible to avenge the many soldiers and settlers slain by them.

Now, it seemed to Buffalo Bill, through risking his life, that the time had come for a severe punishment for the Indians, and hence he had taken the desperate chances of invading the red-skin village pretending to be an outlaw ally.

When he had told the head chief all, Buffalo Bill turned to his pack-horse and began to exhibit the many presents the outlaw captain had sent.

There was a repeating rifle, which however the scout had not brought the ammunition for, revolvers, bowie-knives, red, blue and yellow blankets, beads in great number, and no end of things to catch an Indian's eye.

The chief was overwhelmed, and in turn gave the scout one of his best ponies and some splendid robes and skins, all well tanned with the fur on.

Then he told him that he must remain that night to tell his big chiefs all that he had told him, and at the pow-wow they would decide just what would be done.

Buffalo Bill did not relish a long stay in the Indian village.

He knew that Road-Agent Rob's band, defeated as they had been, and doubtless expecting cavalry from the fort to scour the country for them, might retreat for safety among the red-skins, and coming there find him.

The result would be most awkward for him he well knew.

But he felt that he must at least stay one night, and he was the more anxious to do this as he saw pass by the chief's tepee what at first seemed to him to be a vision.

It was a young girl, tall, slender and with a skin, doubly bronzed though it was, that showed no trace of Indian blood flowing through her veins.

Her hair was of a light bronze hue almost golden, and hung in two long braids down her back, while her eyes were large, dreamy, dark blue and most expressive.

She was dressed in a tight fitting bodice of buckskin, a fringed skirt of the same falling below her knees, leggings that were embroidered and fringed, and moccasins that were neatly made and showed that her foot was small and shapely.

Upon her head was a cap made of birds' feathers, and about her waist was a beaded belt in which was stuck a revolver and knife.

In addition to these she carried in her hand a small rifle and had at her back a red bow and quiver of arrows.

Following her as faithfully as a dog was a spotted pony with buckskin saddle and bridle, and a long lasso coiled up and tied to the former.

Buffalo Bill took in at a glance the beautiful girl, and said at a venture:

"The daughters of the great chief are very beautiful."

Death Hand followed the direction of the scout's eye and quickly called for the girl to come to him.

She did so with remarkable promptness.

The chief knew only a few words of English, and a little Sioux, the scout, as has been stated, was not a Ute scholar, and the two stumbled greatly in their conversation, and many things that Buffalo Bill had said were not wholly clear to the Death Hand.

At once he saw his chance to rectify all mistakes, and said:

"The Wild Lily will talk for the Death Hand to my white brother, for she is not of my people but of his, and speaks his tongue and mine."

"Come, let the Wild Lily know my white brother, and tell me all that he would say to me," and the chief turned to the young girl as she came up to the tepee.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE RECOGNITION.

THE young girl cast a quick, searching glance at Buffalo Bill, half turned, glanced at the chief and then again at the scout.

She seemed suddenly embarrassed and did not speak.

"The Wild Lily will tell me what my pale-face brother would have me know," said the chief.

Then the girl turned to the scout and asked, in a low, strangely musical voice, in perfect English:

"What is it the white chief would have the Death Hand know?"

Buffalo Bill saw that something disturbed the girl, but what he could not guess.

But he at once went over all that he had struggled through before, and she rapidly translated it to the chief.

When he said that the chief Sky Eyes was killed he saw her start visibly, and upon stating that he fell by the hand of Buffalo Bill, he was amazed to hear her words:

"You are Buffalo Bill."

He did not think he had heard aright, and so repeated what he had said, and again came the words uttered rapidly:

"You are Buffalo Bill!"

It was his time to start now, and he did not reply.

The chief saw that there was something wrong and the scout understood in part the words:

"My white brother tells the Wild Lily that the great young chief Sky Eyes was killed by the mighty brave Buffalo Bill."

The scout was relieved at the reply, for he understood well enough to know she then explained to the chief that she had not heard whether Sky Eyes had killed Buffalo Bill, or had been killed by him.

But again came the quickly spoken words:

"You are Buffalo Bill—I know you."

The chief smiled now as though the matter was fully understood, and the scout went on with the plan of Road-Agent Rob, as he said, for the Indians to attack Rawhide City, Silver Nugget, and if possible deliver a blow with the combined bands at the fort.

The girl told all as the scout spoke, and the chief seemed much pleased to find what a splendid chance there was ahead of him for revenge and booty.

Determined to know just what the chief could tell him of the Mad Nemesis, Buffalo Bill said:

"I would ask my red brother, the great chief Death Hand, if the Mad Giant is his friend?"

The girl asked the question, and the chief's face clouded.

Then he said:

"Tell my white brother that the Evil Spirit is the friend of the red-man, the foe of his own people."

"He has given us warning of danger, yet he has led my braves into danger that he might kill."

"His heart is bad, his head is sick, for the Great Spirit has made him suffer."

"My people call him brother, but fear him."

"They do not love him; they do not know him."

"He lives like a wild beast in the mountains, and he would kill the pale-face that crossed his trail."

"He is the Evil Spirit of the Mountains, but my braves would not strike at him, because the Great Spirit has laid his hand upon him."

"He came but a few days ago to tell me that Buffalo Bill was his prisoner in his cavern home—now you tell me that Buffalo Bill killed my good chief Sky Eyes, he who loved the Wild Lily here and asked her to be his wife."

"No, the Evil Spirit has a bad head."

The girl repeated the words of the chief just as he had spoken them.

She showed no emotion when she spoke of Sky Eyes, and the scout at once decided that that love affair was all on one side.

He had only learned that the Mad Avenger was a friend of the Indians, but one they were afraid of.

He asked other questions, but could learn no more than that the madman had roamed the mountains for some years, always killing a soldier when he got the chance, but never revealing himself.

Having gotten all the information he could in that direction, the scout turned his attention to the young girl.

He wished to question her about herself, but felt that he must be extremely cautious, as the chief would surely suspect any underhand work.

Then an idea struck him, and he asked in an aside:

"Do you know how to read?"

"Yes."

"Tell the chief that his brother, Road-Agent Rob, wished me to draw for him on paper the trails his two bands were to go, and mark where they were to meet."

"I will make for him a talking paper."

The chief seemed pleased at this, and taking some paper wrapped about the things he had brought, and a pencil from his pocket, Buffalo Bill began to draw a map of the country, with the trails, the situations of the Indian village, the fort, and the settlements of Rawhide City and Silver Nugget.

Then he wrote lightly, as the girl looked over his map:

"Who are you?"

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE APPOINTMENT.

THE girl smiled, and her manner suddenly changed to almost gayety, as she turned to the chief and spoke rapidly.

She spoke so fast that the scout, with his imperfect knowledge of the Ute tongue could not follow her, yet he thought he heard words enough to convince him that she was telling Death Hand that she could learn to make a "talking paper."

With this she took the scout's pencil, and making certain marks upon another piece of paper, a copy as it were of the map he had drawn, instead of writing the directions, and names of places as he had done like:

"The fort is here," "Rawhide City lies here," "Silver Nugget here," "Have our band take this trail," "Second band take this trail," etc., etc., she wrote.

"I am not an Indian girl."

"Only lately, through a captive white woman, found out how wrong it was for me to live here."

"Say you must return to-night—I will meet you on the trail—have much to tell you."

She showed her map to the chief and he seemed much pleased with it.

So was Buffalo Bill.

He soon after made known to the chief that he must return at once to his captain, that he was anxiously awaiting to know what he, Death Hand, would do, and there was much for the outlaw band to do before they arranged to strike their foes at the settlements and forts.

The chief wished him to remain and meet his warriors in council, but the scout urged that he must go after the council, and that he would explain the "talking paper" to the chiefs and then depart.

So it was arranged, and Death Hand sent

to call his chiefs to council at dark, and at once ordered the best of suppers set before the visitor.

As the supper was mostly composed of the things he had brought, Buffalo Bill enjoyed it, and soon after the pow-wow was called.

One of the chiefs, Red Feather, spoke English fairly well, and as the young girl could not be admitted to a council of braves he served as interpreter.

He explained as Buffalo Bill pointed out his map to him, just what the Indian bands were expected to do, and the time they were to meet at a certain point marked on the map, and which was within a short distance of the settlements to be attacked.

Buffalo Bill scored another point with the assembled chiefs, when he stated that it would be a good idea if an alarm of a rising among the Navahoes to the south was taken to the fort, calling a force of soldiers to be sent in that direction to repel them.

This would leave the fort with but a small force to defend it, when the two bands of Utes attacked after having pounced down upon the two settlements.

Having given all the information within his power, Buffalo Bill smoked the pipe of fellowship with the chiefs, and Red Feather was appointed to escort him upon his way, an honor that the scout would gladly have dispensed with yet dared not decline.

Death Hand called him his brother over and over again, and in leaving, Buffalo Bill saddled and mounted the fine mustang presented him by the chief, who seemed much pleased at this.

Taking his own horse in the lead the scout rode away from the big medicine tepee, and by his side was Red Feather.

The eyes of the scout scanned the village well as he passed through it, gazing into every tepee, and about several camp-fires he saw gathered those whom he knew to be white persons, and who gazed at him with seeming abhorrence of a man who would become a renegade to his own people through his own free will, for they believed him to be the ally of the chief and an outlaw.

When they had cleared the village Buffalo Bill began to plot to get rid of the chief, and he was very cunning about it.

He discussed with him all he had gone over before with the chiefs, and at last proposed to reveal plans which he thought it would be well to have gone over before the pow-wow ended.

To have this done he suggested to the young chief that he had better return and give this alleged valuable information to the chiefs, as to the number of defenders they would have to meet at Rawhide City and Silver Nugget.

He soon convinced Red Feather that these facts should be known to the council of chiefs, and even said he would sacrifice the pleasure of his company to have him return and make them known.

Red Feather had expected to escort the scout through half the night, but he saw a chance for airing himself in a speech, and telling his elders that which could not but impress them, so he bade Buffalo Bill good-by, and with his braves, who were an escort, returned to the village.

Just as Buffalo Bill was beginning to feel he had not gotten rid of the young chief soon enough, that the girl would be afraid to come that far from the village, he suddenly saw in the moonlight a form glide into the trail before him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE SILENT RESCUER.

BUFFALO BILL drew rein very quickly, as the form stood before him in the bright moonlight, gliding out from a growth of timber upon one side of the trail.

He was startled at seeing one that he had twice before beheld.

But it was not the girl that he now saw.

Instead it was the muffled form that had unbound him from the tree, and the second time he was a captive had freed him from the irons in the madman's cave.

It was his silent and unknown rescuer.

"Ah! we meet again, and I suppose I must again be in danger as you appear," said the scout, and he wondered, as he spoke, if he was going to get an answer.

He had not long to wait before he found out, for suddenly the white blanket that enveloped the form was taken from the head, and the moonlight revealed the Indian girl Wild Lily standing before him.

"Well, may I be thrashed with a whip-snake, if I am not completely upset," muttered the scout.

The girl did not catch his words, but said: "I told you I would meet you on the trail, and I have done so."

"Who are you, I now ask again?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I was captured by the Indians when I was a little baby, and a white chief saved them from killing me, and took me to their village with him."

"He treated me kindly, and so did his Indian wife, and he taught me how to read and write as I grew older."

"One day the Indians came into camp with a wounded pale-face, a man so handsome and so brave."

"They were going to burn him at the stake, but I begged hard for his life, and the white chief, who was then head chief of the tribe, spared him."

"He was so good to me, and he taught me a great deal more than the white chief had done, and said that some day he would escape and take me with him."

"But the young braves hated him, and when the white chief was killed in battle one day with the pale-faces, the warriors determined to kill the captive."

"But I overheard their talk, and so I ran to him and aided him to escape that very night."

"Other pale-face captives were brought here, and one, Sky Eyes, was good to me, and he became like a real Indian."

"He said that some day he would marry me, but he had a bad heart to kill his own people, and I did not like him."

"The Indians brought in other white captives, and there are a dozen now in the village, and forced to be Indians, though they do not wish to be, and they have told me how they wanted to get away, and said I ought to go, too, and help them."

"I am like a real Indian, you know, and am looked upon as the daughter of the great white chief, and live with my adopted mother, his wife."

"All the Indians trust me, and they have expected I was to marry Sky Eyes, but I am glad he is dead, for I want to go away from this hateful place, and I am going to do so."

"Yes, with me to-night," said Buffalo Bill, who had listened most intently to the story, told in a childish, simple manner.

"No, I cannot go yet, but I am glad you are safe out of camp, for I knew you as soon as I saw you, and your voice is not one to forget, even if you did talk differently, and make yourself look so ugly."

"How did you know me and never see me before?"

"Why, you have forgotten me already, though I untied you from the tree where the Evil Spirit had bound you, and—"

"Yes, you need say no more, for how could I forget your saving my life twice."

"But then you were all muffled up, and would not speak, and now I see you as a very beautiful Indian girl."

"But I don't wish to be an Indian girl, and will not be much longer."

"But I knew you also by the handcuff on your wrists, which you have covered up with red flannel, though I saw the short chains hanging to each one."

"You have very observing eyes; but why will you not escape now, and let me take you to people of the fort who will be kind to you?"

"I'll tell you why."

"I told you of the white captive who escaped?"

"Yes."

"That was years ago, as the pale-faces count it; but I did not forget him."

"I told you I was like an Indian, and I go alone where I please, and often many miles from the village."

"I have gone on the war-path with the braves, and some time ago, just when you were captured by the Evil Spirit, I was off with a band and was riding alone through the mountains when I came upon a Red

Death Flag pale-face who had a prisoner with him."

"He was taking the prisoner to our village to hand him up to Death Hand and he knew me for he had been there often before."

"He told me that he and two of his comrades had attacked the prisoner, and he had shot down his companions, but his horse had fallen on him, and so he had taken him captive, after wounding him severely."

"I heard all that he told me, and I said nothing, for the prisoner was none other than the captive pale-face I had saved from the stake years before, and who had afterward escaped."

"I did not appear to recognize him and told the bad pale-face I would guard the prisoner while he went to the hill-top to call the band of braves, for I knew he would not find them there."

"He left the prisoner and the horses with me, and I at once cut his bonds, gave him one of his own revolvers and told him I knew him, and he must at once escape, as there were Indians not very far away."

"Before I could say more the bad pale-face returned, saw that his prisoner was free, and they both fired at each other, and my good friend killed his captor."

"Do you want to hear more?"

"Indeed, I do, for I am greatly interested in all you tell me," answered the scout, and it began to dawn upon him, from what he had heard from Texas Jack and Old Buckskin, just who the captive of the outlaws might be.

CHAPTER LXV.

A SECRET SOLVED.

"My good white brother," resumed the young girl, after hearing Buffalo Bill's response, "was wounded in the leg and in the side."

"He could not walk, and as I told him there were Indians not very far away, he said that he knew that country well, and half a mile from where we three were, there was a retreat he had happened to find by accident years before when looking for gold."

"There was plenty of room for his pack-horse, and the one ridden by the bad pale-face, and he would go there, for he had plenty of provisions in his pack, and stay there until he got well enough to go on his way, and that I must come and join him, leaving the Indian village in two weeks, for by then his wounds would have healed."

"We took the body of the bad pale-face, with us, and rode to the retreat, and it was indeed a place no one could find unless happening upon it."

"Then I promised to leave the Indian village when he said and go with him."

"It was the night before that I had untied you from the tree, for I had seen you there just at sunset, for the Evil Spirit had met me and told me that he had Buffalo Bill a prisoner, bound to a tree to await his return from the village, where he was going to warn Death Hand of the soldiers going to attack him."

"I had often seen the Evil Spirit and he knew me well."

"He told me to tell the chief of the band of hunters I was with and that they should wait to join their comrades who would give battle to the pale-faces."

"I said nothing to the chief about seeing the Evil Spirit, and slipping out of camp at night, set you free."

"Then I returned and none of the braves had missed me."

"This I told my white brother, before I left him in his retreat, and he told me to take the body of the bad pale-face and tie it to the tree where you had been bound, so as to give the Evil Spirit a scare."

"This I did, and when I returned to camp, after leaving the body there, the chief told me they were going back to the village, as they had killed game in plenty."

"On the way back we met Death Hand and his warriors marching to attack the soldiers at the pass, and were told that the village had been destroyed."

"Now there is not much more to tell, except that I heard the Evil Spirit tell Chief Death Hand that he had captured you again, and had you a prisoner in his cave."

"Then it was I who jumped on my pony and rode there to rescue you, but I wished nobody to know me, so would say nothing."

"Now you know who I am, and you must go to the retreat of my white brother, for I will tell you how to find it, and tell him I will be there as I promised, and go with him."

"Will you do this for Wild Lily?"

"Gladly," assured the scout, and having learned the story he had so wished to hear, and gotten directions from her just how to find the retreat, he bade her good-by after telling her to be sure and keep her pledge and come and join her white brother whom she seemed to regard so highly."

The scout was afraid for her to longer delay there, or to remain himself, and when the young girl had glided back into the pine thicket, he urged his horse rapidly forward."

It was just dawn that he rode into the canyon where the cave of the Mad Nemesis was located, and he was startled by a shot ringing sharply out on the crisp air, followed by another in rapid succession."

Springing forward he drew up at the cavern, and in the gray light of early morning, beheld his two comrades standing over the dead body of the Mad Nemesis."

"We had to kill him, Bill, for it was like lassoing a mad grizzly, as he tore the lariats off of him like they were yarn, and then sprung toward me with a wild yell."

"As I jumped back I fell and fired, but the shot did not check him and Pard Buckskin here fired."

"It was just in time to save me, for see, his knife is still in his grasp."

"My bullet went clean through him, but it took the one in the head to kill him."

So said Texas Jack, and Old Buckskin added:

"Yes, I was sorry not to take him alive, but there was no alternative, Mr. Cody, but to fire to kill."

"Yes, for I well know what his great strength was, and what he could be when aroused."

"Poor fellow!"

"Who he was and what he was we will never know, I fear, for his secret dies with him."

"Well, it is best that his sorrows are at an end, and a comfort to know that we no longer need fear his deadly deeds."

"But now I have work for you, pards."

"Let us first say how glad we are to see you back from the brink of the grave," and Old Buckskin held out his hand, and the chief of scouts warmly grasped it and then greeted Texas Jack.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE STORY OF A LOCKET.

WHAT Buffalo Bill told his two pards was the strange story of Wild Lily, as she had made it known to him, and quickly had Old Buckskin said:

"It's Duke Dashwood, I'd stake my life!"

"We'll at once go and find out, Chief Cody."

"Yes, as soon as we have had breakfast."

"It is on our way to the fort, and from what the girl said his wounds rendered one arm and leg almost helpless."

"I hope they have not proven more serious than she thought," Old Buckskin said.

The three then set to work to get breakfast, Texas Jack telling Buffalo Bill, meanwhile, how anxious they had been about him, and that the Mad Nemesis had not returned to his cave until that morning, and then had entered the place, little dreaming that foes were there."

The breakfast over, they were about to dig a grave for the madman when Texas Jack said:

"Let us carry his body to the fort with us, for somebody there may identify it; and more, I wish the boys to see the man, the only one who ever matched you, Bill, in a combat."

So the body was enveloped in a blanket and strapped upon the Indian horse that Death Hand had given to Buffalo Bill, and the party set off on the trail to find the retreat where all hoped to find Duke Dashwood."

They kept steadily on their way, and it was nearing sundown when Buffalo Bill, fol-

lowing the directions given him by Wild Lily, remarked:

"We enter this stream here, but do not cross. We turn down it until we come to a large rock on the left hand; there we leave the water, pass around it, and there is a break in a cliff which we ride through and find ourselves in a little basin in the midst of overhanging precipices.

"The basin has a pool in it; it is a couple of acres in size; there are timber and grass in plenty there, and the only way to get in or out is through the narrow break in the cliff, which is just wide enough for us to ride through. The girl told me she stopped the way by tying the lariat across it, and picked up plenty of wood for the wounded man, making him as comfortable as possible before she left.

"Now to see if I am right."

He led the way into the stream and soon came in sight of the rock, where they left the water.

"Eureka!" cried Buffalo Bill, as they came to the break in the cliff, and saw the lariat tied across it.

"He may open fire on us, pards, so let us hail him that he may know we are friends," Old Buckskin suggested.

"You call him by name then, Buckskin."

"I will," and Old Buckskin called out:

"Ho! Silver Bullet Dick, are you there?"

"I am here, and I know that voice, though it has been years since I heard it," was answered from within the little retreat.

But, Old Buckskin was already through the barrier, and turning to the little camp where stood a tall, handsome man of forty-five, with darkly bronzed face, but with the appearance of one who had been ill.

"Dear friend Joe!"

"Thank God, I've found you alive, Duke!"

Such were the salutations of the two men as they warmly clasped hands.

Then Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack were presented, and explanations followed upon both sides.

The story of Duke Dashwood, as he told it, was short and simple.

He had left the frontier a rich man, and had been captured by red-skins on his way from the mines, and had escaped as Wild Lily had said.

Becoming a wanderer he went to foreign lands, and, after years of travel, settled in a fine old home he purchased on the Chesapeake Bay.

But, tiring of that monotonous life, he decided to go West once more and look up his old friends, among them Joe Buck; and also discover what had become of the pretty little girl who had saved his life when he was a captive among the Utes.

Determined to test his old frontier skill, he had left Silver Nugget alone, with a fine saddle horse and a pack-animal—the latter laden down with presents for old friends, for he had heard that Colonel Carrol Kent was in command of Fort Vale.

Three men had followed him from Nugget, and had at last overtaken and attacked him.

Though wounded, and with his horse shot under him, he had killed two of them.

But the third had followed him and held him up, and he had surrendered.

The man had robbed him, even taking his seal ring from his finger and putting it on his own hand, and changed clothing and hats with him.

Then came Wild Lily upon the scene.

"And you stuck to your old habit, Duke, for the man was shot with a silver bullet."

"Yes, pal, I brought my old weapons back with me, and some ammunition I had on hand; but, now to that girl."

"Well?"

"When she was here I asked her much about herself. She told me that the renegade, who would not let the Indians kill her, and who adopted her, used to call her by her baby name, which was engraven on a locket that hung about her neck.

"The locket, she said, had the likeness of a lovely woman and handsome man, who must have been her father and mother, and—"

"And the name in the locket was Irma!"

It was Old Buckskin who spoke, and his voice was so deep and quivering all started

and gazed at him, while Duke Dashwood added:

"You are right, and I was going to tell you that she was your daughter, for she is the image of you!"

"She was not murdered as you supposed, but taken away by the renegade chief."

"Come, old friend, the future holds joy for you, at last!"

"At last! at last!" said Joe Buck, in tones that told how deeply he was moved.

Then the four men sat talking until Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack stole away, toward the horses loose in the little basin, and began to get supper, for night had come on while they talked.

Before they retired, it was decided, as Duke Dashwood's wounds were still painful, that Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack should leave Old Buckskin there with his friend, and also their supplies, while at dawn, the following morning, they should ride rapidly on to the fort, carrying the body of the madman with them.

Buffalo Bill was anxious to report to the colonel the plan the outlaws had made with the chief Death Hand, to raid the settlements, and give him time to get his men ready to entrap the red-skins, and also send a force against the village while the braves were absent.

As the time that Wild Lily was to leave the village, was after Death Hand and his army had departed on their hunt for scalps and plunder, her disappearance would not be known to the absent braves and cause suspicion.

So at daylight Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack started for the fort.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE STORY TOLD.

WORDS cannot express the amazement of Colonel Kent, when Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, in the presence of Colonel Grayson and Major Roy, told, in his modest way, the story of his adventures from the night he went to bury the mangled remains of the man, known now to have been an outlaw.

They heard all he had to say, and they had brought in the body of the Giant Madman, which, as no one at the fort could recognize, was at once given decent burial, and, as the scout remarked, the secret of his life, his wrongs and sorrows was buried with him.

The colonel heard with indignation the plan of the outlaws to bring the Indians down upon the settlements, and said:

"You, Colonel Grayson, will take three hundred men and go to the point selected by Cody to ambush the band attacking Rawhide City, while you, Major Roy, with three hundred men, will protect Silver Nugget, and in both cases you are to take a couple of light guns with you, and get volunteers from the places you are to defend.

"I will leave Captain Branscomb in command here, and go with four hundred cavalry, and two guns, to attack the Indian village, and by the three blows we ought to give a lesson to the Utes that will last a long time.

"Cody, you are to go with me, Texas Jack will accompany Colonel Grayson, and on the way to his position Major Roy can pick up Old Buckskin, and Dashwood must be sent to the fort in an ambulance taken for him."

Such was the plan of action, and all awaited with anxious expectancy the moment when the order would come for the separate commands to move.

At the proper time the orders came, and the three commands filed out of the fort on their separate ways, while the garrison remaining behind was amply able to take care of themselves, should they be attacked by the Indian band beaten back from Rawhide City, on their retreat to their village.

But why follow the brave soldiers into their work of bloodshed, for red work it was, and each command nobly did their duty, and the terrified and amazed Indians were hurled back from their attacks in a wild stampede, while the assault on the village was a perfect triumph, and all the white captives there were released.

Back to the fort went the victorious commands, and upon arriving there the colonel found his old friend Duke Dashwood, and more, there was Irma Buck, once the Wild Lily of the Utes, but happy now in having found her father.

One discovery had Old Buckskin made at Silver Nugget, and that was that the Ruby Queen was none other than Clara Norcross.

The man she had met had been a bankrupt, and she had gone West to follow the fortune of her evil brother and try to win back Duke Dashwood to her.

Accumulating a fortune by gambling she had gone East and in a few years had squandered it, and once more returned to the frontier as the Queen of Rubies.

But ill-fortune had followed her, as Road-Agent Rob was none other than her brother, and this becoming known she had quickly fled, no one knew where, nor was her fate ever known.

The beautiful daughter of Judge Willis was married on the day appointed, and soon after started East with her husband and father upon her wedding tour.

Along with them went Duke Dashwood also, but not alone, as Joe Buck and his daughter also went along, the latter intending to attend school in New York for a year.

Thus is my story told, when I add that there now dwells on the shores of Chesapeake Bay, in a grand old house, Duke Dashwood and his lovely wife, Irma, once the Wild Lily of the Utes, and Joe Buck, no longer known as Old Buckskin, makes his home with them.

Poor Texas Jack died some years ago in Leadville; the army officers of my story are still in harness; the band of Utes have been nearly wiped out, while Buffalo Bill still lives as the hero of heroes!

THE END.

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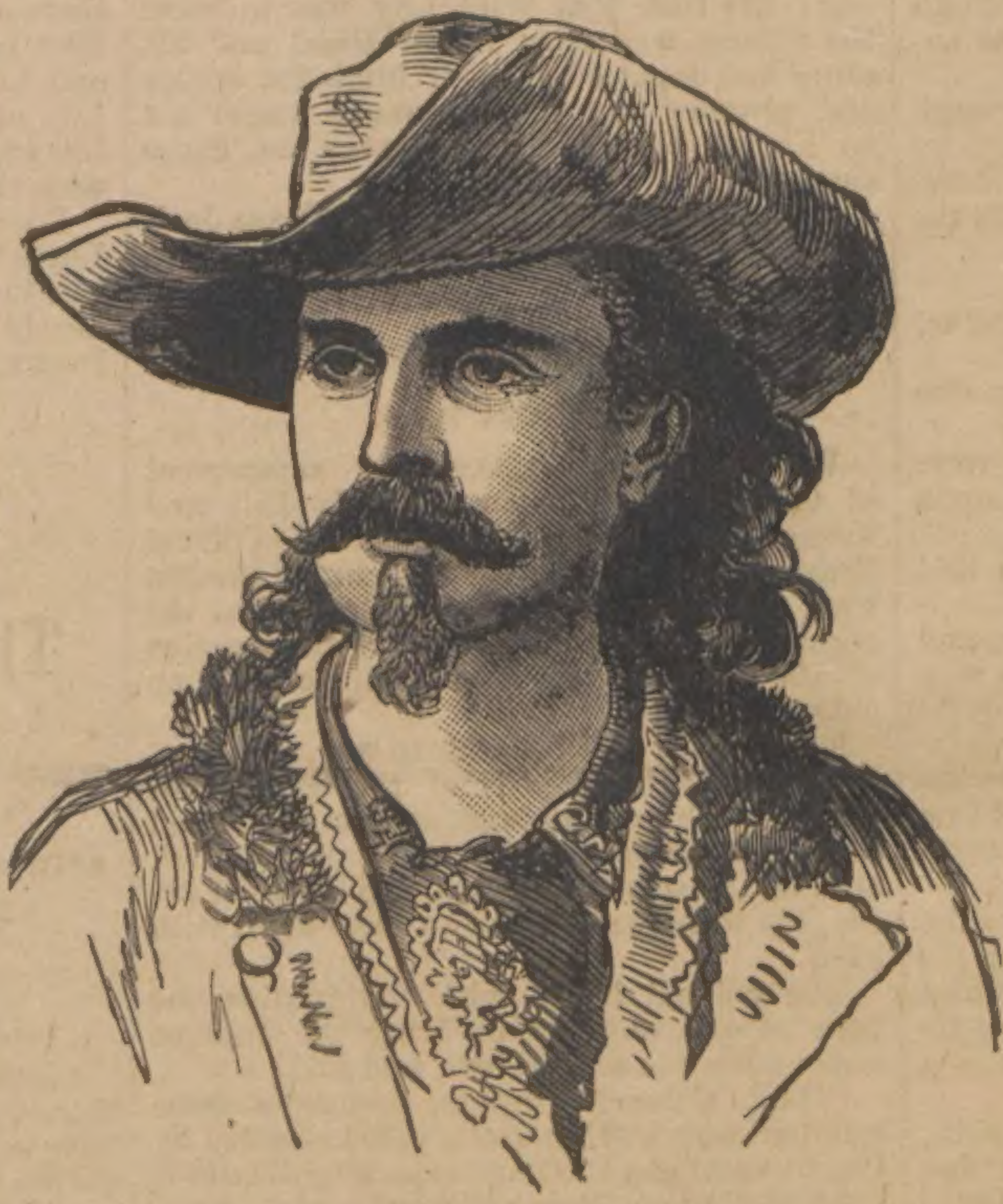
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